

Women and Curiosity in Early Modern England and France

Intersections

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN EARLY MODERN CULTURE

General Editor

Karl A.E. Enenkel (*Chair of Medieval and Neo-Latin Literature*
Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
e-mail: kenen_01@uni_muenster.de)

Editorial Board

W. van Anrooij (*University of Leiden*)
W. de Boer (*Miami University*)
Chr. Göttler (*University of Bern*)
J.L. de Jong (*University of Groningen*)
W.S. Melion (*Emory University*)
R. Seidel (*Goethe University Frankfurt am Main*)
P.J. Smith (*University of Leiden*)
J. Thompson (*Queen's University Belfast*)
A. Traninger (*Freie Universität Berlin*)
C. Zittel (*University of Stuttgart*)
C. Zwierlein (*Harvard University*)

VOLUME 42 – 2016

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/inte

Women and Curiosity in Early Modern England and France

Edited by

Line Cottegnies, Sandrine Parageau
and John J. Thompson



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: Bernard le Bouyer de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des mondes*, in *Œuvres* (11 vols., Paris, Les Libraires associés: 1766), Fontispiece of tome 2. Private Collection.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cottagnies, Line. | Parageau, Sandrine. | Thompson, John J., 1955–
Title: Women and curiosity in early modern England and France / edited by
Line Cottagnies, Sandrine Parageau and John J. Thompson.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2016. | Series: Intersections : interdisciplinary
studies in early modern culture, ISSN 1568-1181 ; volume 42 |
Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016000347 (print) | LCCN 2016009512 (ebook) |
ISBN 9789004311831 (hardback : acid-free paper) |
ISBN 9789004311848 (E-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Women—England—Intellectual life. |
Women—France—Intellectual life. | Curiosity—Social aspects—
England—History. | Curiosity—Social aspects—France—History. |
Knowledge, Sociology of—History. | Great Britain—Intellectual life. |
France—Intellectual life. | Great Britain—History—1485– |
France—History—Bourbons, 1589–1789.

Classification: LCC HQ1599.E5 W587 2016 (print) | LCC HQ1599.E5 (ebook) |
DDC 305.4094209/031—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2016000347>

Want or need Open Access? Brill Open offers you the choice to make your research freely accessible online in exchange for a publication charge. Review your various options on brill.com/brill-open.

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1568-1181

ISBN 978-90-04-31183-1 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-31184-8 (e-book)

Copyright 2016 by Koninklijke Brill nv, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill nv incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi and Hotei Publishing.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill nv provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Notes on the Editors	VII
Notes on the Contributors	VIII
List of Tables and Illustrations	XII

Introduction 1

Line Cottegnies and Sandrine Parageau

- 1 From Genesitic Curiosity to Dangerous Gynocracy in Sixteenth-Century England 27
Yan Brailowsky
- 2 Curious Men and Women in the Tudor Controversy about Women 41
Armél Dubois-Nayt
- 3 This Is, and Is Not, Knowledge: Cressida and the Titillation of Male Curiosity in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* 61
Laura Levine
- 4 'Too Curious a Secrecy': Curiosity in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* 76
Laetitia Coussement-Boillot
- 5 Margaret Cavendish or the Curious Reader 93
Line Cottegnies
- 6 On the Proper Use of Curiosity: Madeleine de Scudéry's *Célinte* 107
Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand
- 7 Mermaids, Women and Curiosity in Seventeenth-Century England 123
Susan Wiseman
- 8 The Interrogative Anne Conway: Curiosity in a Philosophical Context 141
Sarah Hutton
- 9 Female Curiosity and Male Curiosity about Women: The Views of the Cartesian Philosophers 160
Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin

- 10 **Women's Curiosity and Its Double at the Dawn of the Enlightenment** 175
Christophe Martin
- 11 **Between Scientific Investigation and Vanity Fair: Reflections on the Culture of Curiosity in Enlightenment France** 197
Adeline Gargam
- 12 **Virtuoso or Naturalist? Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland** 216
Beth Fowkes Tobin
- 13 **Curiosity, Women, and the Social Orders** 233
Neil Kenny
- Index Nominum** 251

Notes on the Editors

Line Cottegnies

is Professor of English literature at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3. She is the author of a monograph on the politics and poetics of wonder in Caroline poetry, *L'Éclipse du regard: la poésie anglaise du baroque au classicisme* (Geneva: 1997). She has co-edited several volumes of essays, including *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Teaneck – London – New York: 2003), and has published widely on seventeenth-century literature, in particular on Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn and Mary Astell. In addition to editing and translating *Henry VI (Parts I, II and III)*, she has edited twelve other plays for the Gallimard complete works of Shakespeare (Paris, 5 volumes published, 2 forthcoming), and *Henry IV, Part 2* for *The Norton Shakespeare* 3 (New York: 2015).

Sandrine Parageau

is Lecturer in early modern English history at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense. She is the author of *Les Ruses de l'ignorance. La contribution des femmes à l'avènement de la science moderne en Angleterre* (Paris: 2010), which studies the contribution of Margaret Cavendish and Anne Conway to the “Scientific Revolution”. She has co-edited *Les Femmes et leurs représentations en Angleterre de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: 2009) with M. Bernos and L. Sansonetti. She has published several articles and book chapters on women philosophers of the early modern period (Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, Elizabeth Tollet, and Anna Maria Van Schurman) and on the methods of intellectual history.

John J. Thompson

is Professor of English Textual Cultures at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Intersections editorial board with current interests in the European context for English vernacular biblical and historical understanding in the pre-Enlightenment period. He has published widely on late-medieval English book production and reader reception, including monographs on the ‘London Thornton’ literary miscellany, and on the Middle English ‘Cursor Mundi’, and has headed two collaborative research projects funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council as large-scale cultural mapping exercises, the first on ‘Imagining History’ in the Middle English ‘Prose Brut’, and the second on ‘Geographies of Orthodoxy’ in English Pseudo-Bonaventuran religious writing traditions.

Notes on the Contributors

Yan Brailowsky

is Lecturer in early modern literature and history at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense. He is the author of *The Spider and the Statue: Poisoned Innocence in A Winter's Tale* (Paris: 2010) and *William Shakespeare: King Lear* (Paris: 2008), and has co-edited: *1970–2010, les sciences de l'Homme en débat* (Paris: 2013), '*A sad tale's best for winter*': *Approches critiques du Conte d'hiver de Shakespeare* (Paris: 2011), *Le Bannissement et l'exil en Europe aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Paris: 2010), and *Language and Otherness in Renaissance Culture* (Paris: 2008).

Laetitia Coussement-Boillot

is Lecturer at the Université Paris 7 – Denis Diderot, where she teaches British literature. She has co-edited *Richard II: lectures d'une œuvre* (Nantes: 2004), *Coriolan: lectures d'une œuvre* (Nantes: 2006), and "*Silent rhetoric, dumb eloquence: the Rhetoric of Silence in Early Modern England*" (*Cahiers Charles V*, Université Paris 7 – Diderot, 43, 2007). She is the author of *Copia et Cornucopia: la rhétorique shakespearienne de l'abondance* (Bern: 2008). She is currently working on women writers in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and more particularly on Lady Mary Wroth.

Armel Dubois-Nayt

is Lecturer at the Université Versailles – Saint-Quentin. She teaches English language and British history. Her research interests focus on women's history and the history of political thought in the sixteenth century, both in Scotland and England. She has published several articles on John Knox and George Buchanan and co-written a book on women, power and nation in Scotland from the fifteenth century to the present, *Femmes, pouvoir et nation en Écosse du XVI^e siècle à aujourd'hui* (Lille: 2012). She has co-edited several volumes of essays or special issues of journals, including *Revisiter la Querelle des femmes. Discours sur l'égalité/inégalité des femmes et des hommes, de 1400 à 1600* (Saint-Étienne: 2013). Her research has also explored women's writings and women's history writing through the works of Mary, Queen of Scots, Ann Dowriche, Arbella Stuart, Lady Margaret Hoby, Ann Clifford and Elizabeth Southwel.

Adeline Gargam

is research associate at the Institut d'Histoire de la Pensée classique (Lyon). She works on the historical representations and attitudes to women and their

relationship to literary and scientific culture in the age of Enlightenment. Her research is at the crossroads of literary studies, the history of ideas and mentalities, and the history of science. She has published widely on women collectors of the Enlightenment, and is the author of *Les Femmes savantes, lettrées et cultivées au siècle des Lumières ou la conquête d'une légitimité 1690–1804* (2 vol., Paris: 2013). She has also co-authored, with B. Lançon, *Histoire de la misogynie: racines et ramifications européennes* (Paris: 2013). She has recently edited a collection of essays entitled *Femmes de Sciences de l'Antiquité au XIX^e siècle: réalités et représentations* (Dijon: 2014).

Sarah Hutton

is Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of York. Her research specialism is early modern and intellectual history, with special interests in the Cambridge Platonists and women and philosophy. Her publications include *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: 2015), *Anne Conway. A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: 2004), *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, edited with Douglas Hedley (Dordrecht: 2008), *Women, Science and Medicine*, edited with Lynette Hunter (Stroud: 1996), *Platonism and the English Imagination*, edited with A. Baldwin (Cambridge: 1994), as well as articles on Margaret Cavendish, Émilie du Châtelet, and Catharine Macaulay. She has also published a revised version of *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More and their Friends*, originally edited by M. Nicolson in 1930 (Oxford: 1992). She is Director of the series *International Archives in the History of Ideas*.

Neil Kenny

is Senior Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. Previously he held posts at the University of Cambridge, Queen Mary (University of London), and the Warburg Institute. His publications include *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: 2015), *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) and *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe: Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998). His current research project is on the relation between literature, learning, and social hierarchy in early modern France.

Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand

is Professor of early modern French Literature at the Université de Caen – Basse Normandie. She is a specialist of seventeenth-century fiction, and in particular an expert on Georges and Madeleine de Scudéry. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters, and has published *La Lettre dans le récit. Étude*

de l'œuvre de Mlle de Scudéry (Biblio 17, Tübingen: 2000) and *Les longs romans: Urfé, Desmarests, Gomberville, La Calprenède, Les Scudéry* (Paris: 2013). She has also edited Scudéry's *La Promenade de Versailles* (Paris: 2002).

Laura Levine

is an Associate Professor of Theatre Studies in the Tisch School of The Arts at New York University, where she is the recipient of the 2010 Distinguished Teaching Award. Her first book, *Men in Women's Clothing. Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579–1642* was published with Cambridge University Press in 1994. She has held fellowships from NEH, The Folger Shakespeare Library, the Mary Ingraham Bunting Foundation among others to support ongoing research on anxieties about witchcraft during the early modern period.

Christophe Martin

is Professor of eighteenth-century French literature at the Université Paris – Sorbonne. He is the author of *Espaces du féminin dans le roman français du dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford: 2004), “*Dangereux Suppléments*”. *L'illustration du roman en France au dix-huitième siècle* (Louvain-Paris: 2005), “*Éducatrices négatives*”. *Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: 2010), *Diderot. La Religieuse* (Paris: 2010), *Mémoires d'une inconnue. La Vie de Marianne de Marivaux* (Rouen: 2014). He has edited *Fictions de l'origine, 1650–1800* (Paris: 2012) and *Les Lettres persanes de Montesquieu* (Paris: 2013) and has co-edited several volumes including *Violences du rococo* with J. Berchtold and R. Démoris (Bordeaux: 2012), and *Rousseau et le spectacle* with J. Berchtold and Y. Séité (Paris: 2014).

Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin

is Lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3. She teaches the history of early modern philosophy, political philosophy and metaphysics. She works mainly on Descartes and Cartesianism. After an essay on Malebranche (*Le Système de la loi de Nicolas Malebranche*, Paris: 2006), she edited the first complete version of the three feminist treatises of Poulain de la Barre in 2011 (*De l'égalité des sexes; De l'éducation des dames; De l'excellence des hommes*, Paris: 2011). She has also recently edited *Penser au féminin au XVII^e siècle* (special issue of *Revue philosophique* 3 (2013)), and co-edited, with D. Kolesnik-Antoine, *Élisabeth de Bohême face à Descartes: deux philosophes?* (Paris: 2014).

Beth Fowkes Tobin

is Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Georgia, USA. She is the author of *The Duchess's Shells: Natural History Collecting in the Age of*

Cook's Voyages (London – Yale: 2014). Tobin's research falls into three distinct but interrelated categories of inquiry: the art and literature of empire; women and material culture; and the construction of knowledge about nature. She is the author of two award-winning books, *Picturing Imperial Power: British Subjects in British Painting* (Chapel Hill: 1999) and *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760–1830* (Philadelphia: 2005), and is an editor of a series of volumes of collected essays on women and material culture (Farnham).

Susan Wiseman

teaches at Birkbeck College, London. Her research interests are in Renaissance and seventeenth-century writing and culture. Specific interests include ideas of change and transformation in the period 1550–1750, writings of the Civil War and of the Restoration, women's literary and political writing, writing and politics. She is the author of *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: 2006), *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War* (Cambridge: 1998), *Aphra Behn* (Writers and Their Work Series, Northcote House: 2007), and *Writing Metamorphosis in the English Renaissance 1550–1700* (Cambridge: 2014). She has co-edited *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night* with K. Hodgkin and M. O'Callaghan (London: 2006), *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, with E. Fudge and R. Gilbert (London: 1999; pbk 2002), *Refashioning Ben Jonson*, with J. Sanders and K. Chedgzoy (London: 1998), and *Women, Writing, History: 1640–1740* with I. Grundy (London: 1992).

List of Tables and Illustrations

Tables

- 11.1 The various types of cabinets 199
- 11.2 Women collectors in the three social orders 200
- 11.3 Contents of collections 202

Illustrations

- 12.1 Lauren Nassef, "The Duchess of Portland", Pencil on paper, 2010 216
- 12.2 Charles Grignion after E.F. Burney, Frontispiece of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum* (London, s.n.: 1786) 218

Introduction

Line Cottagegies and Sandrine Parageau

In his *Contemplations on the Old Testament* (1612), Joseph Hall, who would become Bishop of Exeter in 1627, comments on the story of one of the most curious women in the Bible, Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob (*Genesis* 34). Dinah had the irrepressible itch to see what was happening outside her home because, Hall says: 'she [had] a fault in her eyes, which was Curiosity'.¹ Unable to repress her desire to see the world, Dinah went out to gaze and, as she stepped out, she was seen by Shechem, who raped her. Joseph Hall explains that if Dinah had stayed at home and had not yielded to a curious impulse, she would not have been raped. He adds that woman's curiosity causes disorder and even chaos as Dinah's brothers then revenge their sister's dishonour by killing all the men in the city. Hall describes the escalating violence that ensues from Dinah's curiosity: 'Ravishment follows upon her wandering, upon her ravishment murder, upon the murder spoyle' (209). Female curiosity is represented here as a transgression, in its etymological sense of 'crossing': Dinah's stepping across is quite literally a liminal act as she walks over the threshold of her home. But above all, this chapter from Hall's *Contemplations* shows how curious women are essentially seen as temptresses: at the very moment when women are gazing, they are seen and turned into objects of curiosity themselves. Thus, Bishop Hall's commentary on this passage from the Old Testament shows women's curiosity as a natural consequence of their being curious and desirable objects: 'She [Dinah] will needs see, and be seene; and while she doth vainely see, she is seene lustfully' (200). Woman's vanity, which entices her to see, simultaneously turns her into a temptress. Woman's curiosity and her being seen as a curious object are therefore concomitant; but Hall's chapter also implies that they are logically linked: it is *because* woman is

1 This book has greatly benefited from the advice and encouragement of the larger scholarly community. Line Cottagegies and Sandrine Parageau would most particularly like to thank Sarah Hutton and Stephen Clucas for opportunities to present early sections of this work respectively at the *Centre for Women's Writing and Literary Culture* (Aberystwyth University) and *Emphasis Seminar* (Institute of English Studies, London).

Hall Joseph, *Contemplations upon the Principall Passages of the Holy Storie. The First Volume* (London, M. Bradwood: 1612) 199–209 (200). Hall interprets Dinah's story as a warning against the consequences of curiosity. Yet, in the Bible, there is no mention or condemnation of Dinah's inquisitiveness.

being curious that she is turned into an object of curiosity and it is *because* she is tempted that she becomes a temptress. This passage gives us some insight into the complexity of the double relation of women to curiosity, while revealing common early modern attitudes to women and curiosity. For in the period women were commonly seen as both curious subjects *and* objects of curiosity. Biblical and mythological figures such as Eve, Pandora or Lamia illustrated and, to a certain extent, accounted for women's inherent proneness to curiosity. Women were also the objects of men's curiosity, as shown by the great number of writings on 'women's secrets' – an expression that referred to the mysteries of the reproductive system –, the scientific interest in the dissection of female bodies and the abundant literature on witches, mermaids and other kinds of female monsters.² The first aim of this book is to shed light on the articulation of both the subjective and the objective relations of women to curiosity, the relation between women as curiosities and women as inquirers in early modern England and France.

The second line of thought that guided the general reflection presented by the essays in this book deals with the assumed rehabilitation of curiosity in the early modern period and its impact on women's desire for knowledge. While curiosity had long been considered as an intellectual vice, associated with hubris and the original sin, it allegedly became a virtue in the seventeenth century.³ In his seminal article on curiosity and forbidden knowledge in early modern England,⁴ historian and philosopher Peter Harrison argues that one of the main reasons for the rehabilitation of curiosity was the continued efforts of natural philosophers to demonstrate that curiosity was morally acceptable in order to legitimize their scientific endeavour and the new science. As a consequence, curiosity came to be encouraged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1690), for instance, John Locke praised children's curiosity, which he felt needed to be answered seriously:

-
- 2 See for example Daston L. – Park K. (eds.), *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1550–1750* (New York: 1998); Park K. "Dissecting the Female Body: From Women's Secrets to the Secrets of Nature", in Donawerth J. – Seeff A. (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries. Attending to Early Modern Women* (Cranbury, N.J.: 2000) 29–47; Park K., *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation and the Origin of Human Dissection* (New York: 2006).
 - 3 The idea that curiosity became a virtue in the early modern period was the main thesis of Hans Blumenberg in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: 1986).
 - 4 Harrison P. "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England", *Isis* 92 (2001) 265–290.

Curiosity in children [...] is but an appetite after Knowledge, and therefore ought to be encouraged in them, not only as a good sign, but as the great Instrument Nature has provided, to remove that ignorance they brought into the world with them, and which without this busy *Inquisitiveness* would make them dull and useless Creatures.⁵

In the eighteenth century, David Hume also defined curiosity in laudatory terms as 'that love of truth, which is the first source of all our enquiries'.⁶ Yet it has been convincingly suggested that the new status of curiosity in the early modern period led instead to an even stronger distrust of women's curiosity, in particular by Neil Kenny and by Barbara Benedict.⁷ As Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston have reminded us, one should be suspicious of any grand narrative that claims to map out 'the transformation of curiosity from grave vice to outright peccadillo'.⁸ The same is true of the neat, linear narrative which claims to sketch the history of a straightforward rehabilitation of curiosity, whether male or female.⁹ Neil Kenny in particular has shown how curiosity is always the product of at least two kinds of historical time scales, a 'histoire événementielle', which sometimes involves relatively swift changes, and 'longue durée' history, which implies series of paradigmatic shifts often undecipherable for the naked eye.¹⁰ Taking as its premises recent research on the gendered aspect of the history of curiosity, this book aims at examining anew how women's curiosity was represented and defined in England and in France in the early modern period, and it tries to do so from an interdisciplinary perspective. Taken together, the essays in this volume also study how women confronted the stigma attached to curiosity as *libido sciendi*, and how they joined in the culture of curiosity that led both to the rise of scientific enquiry and to

-
- 5 Locke John, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (London, A. and J. Churchill: 1693) 134 (Locke's emphasis). Locke adds that curiosity should be encouraged in boys and girls alike.
 - 6 Hume David, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, John Noon: 1739) vol. 2, book II, part III, section 10 "Of Curiosity, or the Love of Truth" 308.
 - 7 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 22: 'Although in the seventeenth century curiosity often became more positive than it had been previously, mostly it was male curiosity that was transformed in this way [...]. An even larger proportion of bad curiosity was now female'. See also Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001), in particular 118–154.
 - 8 Daston L. – Park K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 306.
 - 9 Evans R.J.W. – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: 2006) 7.
 - 10 Kenny N., *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998) 15.

the collecting impetus. They focus on a central moment, between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, of the fraught history of how women gained access to an intellectual and cultural world from which they had been mostly excluded until then. That this was not a linear history is perfectly symbolized in the ambivalent representation (designed by Clavaro and engraved by Duflos) of Fontenelle's Marquise which serves as a frontispiece for an eighteenth-century edition of *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des mondes* (here our frontcover illustration). The *Entretiens* (discussed by Christophe Martin in chapter 10 of this volume) is probably the most emblematic of pre-Enlightenment texts, and stages a series of philosophical conversations between a philosopher and an inquisitive Marquise, who is taught to reason about the cosmos in the process. The frontispiece shows the Marquise presumably thinking about the courses of planets, perhaps even calculating their trajectories using a pair of compasses and a celestial globe, but she is in her *boudoir*, sitting at her dressing table on which rests a temporarily-abandoned mirror, powder boxes and bottles of perfume. A couple of grimacing *putti* in the foreground highlight the presence of a discarded fan on the floor. Underneath the engraving, a caption underlines the emblematic oxymoron, the opposition (or alliance?) between intellect and female vanity which is inherent, it seems, in the representation of a woman philosophizing: 'De l'esprit et des appas. / L'éventail et le compas' ('Wit and charm. / The fan and the compasses', or 'Of wit and charm. / The fan and the compasses'). In a subtle reworking of a commonplace of *vanitas* painting, the conventional representation of a woman with her mirror or at her toilet,¹¹ this illustration reflects, it seems to us, the difficulty of thinking about the complex relationship between femininity and knowledge, often reconfigured as a straightforward opposition between sensuality and intellect, in the early modern period. As Martin shows below, however, Fontenelle subtly overturns this commonplace, by recuperating, even glorifying the Marquise's sensual curiosity as the very condition of philosophy.

This is the first collection of essays that sets out to deal in a representative way with the various aspects of female curiosity in the early modern period from representations to epistemology and theology, and from cultural history and the history of collections to literary history. By comparing France and England it situates women's relations to curiosity in two very different intellectual traditions – England's empiricist approach to science and knowledge on the one hand, and French Cartesianism on the other, although, as will be

11 Several examples of paintings using this motif could be given here from Titian to Velàquez. See for instance Diego Velàquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, 1647–1651, 122 × 177 cm, National Gallery, London.

apparent, this opposition must be qualified. Because it focusses on England and France, this book also confronts two histories of scholarship which shed light on each other. Finally, it brings together a set of international scholars working on very different fields (history of philosophy, history of representations, history of collections and of material culture, French and English literatures).

A Short History of Curiosity

In the patristic tradition, curiosity was associated with the original sin and therefore considered as a vice. In the fifth century, borrowing from the First Letter of Saint John, Augustine famously distinguished between three kinds of temptation, three interrelated forms of desire or concupiscence, *libido domnandi* (desire for power), *libido sentiendi* (sensual desire), and *libido sciendi* (*the desire to know*), also called *curiositas*, emphasizing the need to curb each of them to remain within the bounds of true faith.¹² *Curiositas*, or 'concupiscence of the gaze' (*concupiscentia oculorum*, *Confessions* x. 35, also sometimes translated as 'the lust of the gaze') as he defined it, was associated with vanity (*vanitas*), an echo of *Ecclesiastes* ('Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'). As evidence of the dangers of curiosity, Augustine mentions how the desire to see and to know leads to an unhealthy attraction for novelty and sensation, and even for spectacles of horror, such as public executions or theatrical illusions:

[...] for pleasure seeketh objects beautiful, melodious, fragrant, savoury, soft; but curiosity, for trial's sake, the contrary as well, not for the sake of suffering annoyance, but out of the lust of making trial and knowing them. For what pleasure hath it, to see in a mangled carcase what will make you shudder? and yet if it be lying near, they flock thither, to be made sad, and to turn pale. Even in sleep they are afraid to see it. As if when awake, any one forced them to see it, or any report of its beauty drew them thither! Thus also in the other senses, which it were long to go through. From this disease of curiosity are all those strange sights exhibited in the theatre...¹³

Augustine made of curiosity a passion that needed to be strictly controlled, the negativity of which was eventually and spectacularly developed for his own

12 Augustine, *De vera religione*, in *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, t. 8, Bibliothèque augustinienne, XXXVIII, 70, 127.

13 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E. Bouverie Pusey (Chicago: 2007) 286.

purposes by the emblemist Cesare Ripa, who, with his book *Iconologia* (originally published in 1593, but in 1603 with illustrations), offered a kind of guide to the symbolism of the early modern period with a collection of allegories, and described curiosity as having (here in the words of an eighteenth-century translator):

[...] abundance of Ears and Frogs on her Robe; her Hair stands up on end; Wings on her Shoulders; her Arms lifted up: she thrusts out her Head in a prying Posture. The Ears denote the Itch of knowing more than concern her. The Frogs are Emblems of Inquisitiveness, by reason of their goggle-Eyes. The other things denote her running up and down, to hear, and to see, as some do after News.¹⁴

Curiosity is thus associated with an irrepressible and unruly desire to hear and to see; a female allegory here, it is clearly associated in this eighteenth-century translation specifically with gossip and news.

From the Fathers of the Church right through at least as far as the early years of the seventeenth century, curiosity about intellectual and spiritual matters was considered suspicious because of its potentially transgressive nature. Curiosity had yet to be redefined as a noble and licit form of investigation in the philosophical discourses of the period. Francis Bacon played an important part in setting up the conditions for the development of a positive form of curiosity by stressing that the pursuit of knowledge must be made morally acceptable by usefulness. This was the condition for it to be redeemed from the stigma of negative curiosity, understood as excessive curiosity for things that should not be looked into, especially things theological. It is clear that, in order to be legitimized, the pursuit of knowledge had to dissociate itself from accusations of vanity, and from the opprobrium of a guilty and concupiscent desire.¹⁵ In *The Great Instauration* (1620), Bacon makes this particularly clear, asking of his readers, in conclusion:

14 Ripa Cesare, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems*, trans. P. Tempest (London, Benjamin Motte: 1709) 20. This translation is in fact quite free.

15 The *memento mori* or genre of the *vanitas* painting testifies both to the desire to moralize this new curiosity for objects and to a fascination for the objects themselves. On curiosity and vanity, see Cottagnies L. – Parageau S. – Venet G. (eds.), *Curiosité(s) et vanité(s) dans les îles Britanniques et en Europe (XVI^e–XVII^e siècles)*, *Études Épistémè* 27 (2015).

[...] that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of the mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity.¹⁶

Here, Bacon dissociates worthy curiosity from pride and from the quest for power (focussing on the ethics of the philosopher), and he submits philosophical enquiry to the notion of usefulness in the service of the common good. By doing so, Bacon contributed to liberating scientific curiosity from a damning theological stigma. This, in turn, laid the foundation for what has been described as the ‘culture of curiosity’, which emerged in the context of experimentalism and blossomed under the influence of the Royal Society.¹⁷ Similarly, Descartes encouraged intellectual curiosity, understood as the pursuit of knowledge, as long as it remained under the control of reason and was directed at objects that could lead to truth. He insisted in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1701) that curiosity should be satisfied, but within the limits of a strict method.¹⁸ Again, in the dialogue of *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light* (1701), he opposed insatiable curiosity to the curiosity of ‘orderly souls’ or methodical minds.¹⁹ It comes as no surprise then that the fellows of the Royal Society should have called on him, both as ‘the father of English empiricism’ and ‘the father of French rationalism’, to legitimize their scientific endeavours. Meanwhile, the impulse to see and to collect also led to the constitution of cabinets of curiosities, and to a commercial culture of collecting, in the context of the development of exploration, colonization and commerce.

16 Preface to Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna*, in Bacon Francis, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. J.M. Robertson (Abingdon – New York: 1905) 247.

17 On the ‘culture of curiosity’, see Whitaker K., “The Culture of Curiosity”, in Jardine N. – Secord J.A. – Spary E.C. (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: 1996) 75–90; Pomian K., *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1987) 61–80; Findlen P., *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 1994), and Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity*.

18 Descartes René, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* [*Règles pour la direction de l’esprit*, first published 1701], in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: 1985), ed. and trans. J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch, vol. 1, rule VIII, 28–33.

19 Descartes René, *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light* [*La Recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle*, first published 1701], in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch, vol. 2, 402.

Yet this partial rehabilitation of curiosity between Bacon and Hume was largely confined to male curiosity. As male curiosity was rehabilitated, women were increasingly described as prone to a negative form of curiosity, and, for those who were stubborn enough to transgress the interdict, turned into curiosities themselves, as a strategy of shaming and of marginalization. For Barbara M. Benedict, 'as women began to encroach on the masculine arenas of politics, literature, and consumption, curiosity without method and without justification became female'.²⁰ Accusing women of a bad form of curiosity became *de facto* a means of controlling them and of re-assigning more conventional gender roles in an increasingly volatile and socially-mobile society.²¹ This can perhaps explain Fénelon's peremptory (and damning) statement in his 1687 treatise on the education of young girls, otherwise considered as fairly progressive: 'It is true that one should be wary of creating ridiculous learned women. Women generally have a more feeble mind and are more curious than men'.²² Fénelon used this characterization of women as necessarily curious to restrict girls' reading and to curb their inquisitiveness. Similarly, in the seventeenth century, the French moralist La Fontaine wrote that curiosity was the main 'fault of the fair sex'.²³

In the early modern period, women's bad curiosity was mostly apparent in the itch to talk and hear about others' lives that was deemed to characterize the 'fair sex'. Following St Paul's description of young widows as 'idle, [...] tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not' (1 *Timothy* 5, King James Version), it was commonly held in early modern Europe that women could not help gossiping.²⁴ It was assumed that they exchanged gossips at Church, or while they were knitting by the fireside, or spinning on their

20 Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History* 118.

21 'Curiosity', Kenny argues, was 'used in attempts to control women', in *The Uses of Curiosity* 14.

22 Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* [1689], ed. B. Jolibert (Paris: 1994) 37. (Our translation)

23 La Fontaine Jean de, "Psyché", in *Oeuvres de Monsieur de la Fontaine, nouvelle édition* (n. l., Jacob and Henry Sauvage: 1726) t. 3, 93. Cf. Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 386 ff., and Coudreuse A., "Justine ou les bonheurs de la curiosité", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido Sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) vol. 2, 393–421.

24 'Gossip' originally meant a godparent of either sex but it progressively took negative and female connotations. See for instance Capp B., *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 2003) 7. Gossip came to denote any close female friend (51).

doorsteps,, thus creating a ‘female social space’²⁵ that men disapproved of. Although defamation cases tend to show that men used to tattle as often as women, a number of books were published in which (male) authors imagined what women talked about when they gathered together. Thus, in the early seventeenth century, Samuel Rowlands devoted several books to gossips’ conversations, such as *Tis Merry When Gossips Meete* (1602), in which a wife, a widow and a maid, happen to meet in the street in London and have a drink in a tavern. They talk mainly about their own marital status rather than about other people’s lives. It seems that male authors imagined that when married women met, they talked about their husbands: in Rowlands’s *A Whole Crew of Kind Gossips, All Met to Be Merry* (1609), six wives complain about their husbands. The book – like many other books on women’s gossip published at the time – reveals men’s anxiety about the content of women’s conversations. In the pamphlet, the fourth wife, who complains about her husband being a gambler, says: ‘He is a gamester, though no Cocke of game, / For I do find he doth his business lame, / In things (you know my meaning) leant worth praise.’²⁶ The quotation makes clear that men especially feared women’s public comments on their husbands’ sexual performance.

Figures of Female Curiosity

It could be said that the association between women and a negative form of curiosity was always part of popular wisdom. Many folk tales and fairy tales (a good number of which were actually transcribed or written up in the seventeenth century) are about female curiosity – with a strong moralistic bias, since such a feature is clearly presented as a sin that is eventually punished. Numerous examples could be given of this, like the famous story of ‘Bluebeard’, which belongs to folklore, but was written up by Charles Perrault at the end of the seventeenth century. Several tales belonging to folklore focus on a woman’s transgression because of her curiosity. In one popular Welsh tale, a woman is hired to look after the children of mysterious rich people in a beautiful mansion. One of her tasks involves rubbing the children’s eyes with some ointment every morning, but she is specifically told not to touch her own eyes with it. Naturally, one day, she applies the ointment to her own (left) eye, and discovers

25 Hindle S., “The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in Early Modern England”, *Continuity and Change* 9 (1994) 391–419 (392).

26 Rowlands Samuel, *Tis Merry When Gossips Meete* (London, W. W[hite]: 1602) and *A Whole Crew of Kind Gossips, All Met to Be Merry* (London, W. Iaggard for John Deane: 1609).

that she is in the presence of ugly fairies, and that the children she is looking after are repulsive gnomes.²⁷ One day, going to the fair, she recognises her former master stealing something from a stall, and goes up to him. Because he is supposed to be invisible, this is as much as telling the fairy that she has been lying to him all along. The fairy's revenge is appropriate: the woman becomes blind in her left eye and thus loses her insight into fairy world. In these folk tales, female curiosity is generally about the irrepressible desire to see what is beyond one's reach, about transgressing an interdiction, with dire consequences for the culprit's disobedience. This reminds us of similar tropes in both ancient mythology and the Bible, and among these Pandora, Eve and Dinah naturally come to mind as exemplary types of curious transgressive women.

But in many other stories involving women and curiosity, women were not actually punished for being overly curious. Instead, curiosity was the punishment they received for a transgression or for allegedly trespassing traditional gender boundaries. A good example is Plutarch's treatise "Of Curiosity",²⁸ which was translated into English by Queen Elizabeth I in 1598 (from Erasmus's Latin version) and widely read in the seventeenth century. It tells the story of Lamia, the queen of Libya, who was Zeus' mistress. In one of the numerous versions of the story, which seems to be the one Plutarch used, Lamia was persecuted by Hera, who punished her with the inability to close her eyes and therefore to sleep, so that she was reduced to wandering day and night. In order to alleviate Lamia's pain, Zeus gave her the ability to remove her eyes at night, so she could sleep, but as soon as she put her eyes back on during the day, she would start wandering again and pry into other people's secrets. Curiosity is here defined as the desire to poke one's nose into other people's secrets, and more precisely as an interest in people's woes, a desire to know the faults and imperfections in other men. Plutarch's lesson from this story is that the eye is an instrument of indiscretion and malevolence. He insists therefore on the necessity to guide one's passions: men and women should turn their curiosity to their souls or the secrets of nature, and not other people's lives.

But what is remarkable in Plutarch's "On Curiosity" is that Lamia is not inherently curious, curiosity being the punishment for her being Zeus' mistress (and for being a temptress), not the cause of her misery. She is the unfortunate victim of Hera's overwhelming jealousy. Yet, in the early modern period, the word 'lamia' came to be synonymous with 'monster', 'witch', or 'she-demon'.

27 Thiselton-Dyer T.F. (ed.), *Folk-Lore of Women* [1906] (Los Angeles: 2010) 130–134.

28 In Greek: *polypragmosyne*, i.e. busyness, meddling. See Plutarch, *On Curiosity*, trans. M. Wheeler, ed. W.W. Goodwin (Boston: 1878).

This tends to show that stereotypes of woman as the very embodiment of bad curiosity are often later ideological constructions, based on former narratives that stigmatize curiosity, but bent along gender lines. Indeed, when one looks at the sources, one realizes that the female types are not wholly identified with a negative form of curiosity, or rather (which is slightly different) that bad curiosity is not specifically designated as necessarily female. A telling example is that of Pandora, who was first described in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (written in the eighth century BC). She is the first woman (like Eve), but created by Zeus specifically to punish mankind, as a revenge on Prometheus, who stole fire from him. On Zeus' command, Pandora is endowed by various gods with attributes likely to make her bewitching to Prometheus' not-so-clever brother, Epimetheus. Epimetheus, who has been told by his brother to refuse any gift from Jupiter, falls into the trap, disobeys his brother, and falls for Pandora. Among Pandora's attributes (the name Pandora means either the 'all-gifted' or the 'all-giving'), she is given by Hermes, 'The crafty spy, and messenger of Godheads', 'a dogged (sometimes shameless) Minde, / And theevisch Manners' (i.e. craft), in the words of the poet and playwright George Chapman who translated the text in 1618.²⁹ As the story goes, Pandora is given a box by Zeus – in fact a large urn in the original, and the change is to be attributed to Erasmus, who translated the Greek text into Latin –, in which Zeus puts all the evils of the world. When Pandora opens the box, all the evils spread into the world, while only hope remains in the jar after Epimetheus manages to shut it. It is interesting to notice, though, that in sources of the ancient myth (here in an early seventeenth-century translation), Pandora is not explicitly characterized as curious. In fact, in Hesiod's text, she is not given any clear motive for taking off 'the unwieldy lid'. The reader is left to interpret her motivation, which could be an act of sheer malice, the result of imprudence, or an inevitable consequence of the insatiable libido of one described as having her breast full of 'wild Desires, incapable of Rest'. It was the argument of the insatiable libido that became the standard version, when it was read in conjunction with *Genesis*: woman was enduringly interpreted as the temptress who drove man to infringe the interdict. Significantly, Chapman includes a footnote at this point, which, in order to moralize this myth into a Christian teaching, looks for typological parallels between ancient myth and the Bible. In this footnote, Chapman sees Pandora allegorically as:

29 Hesiod, *The Georgicks of Hesiod*, by George Chapman; translated elaborately out of the Greek, trans. G. Chapman (London, Miles Partrick: 1618) 4.

Appetite, or effeminate affection; and customarie, or fashionable Indulgence to the blood; not onely in womanish affectations; but in the generall fashions of Mens Iudgements and action [...] Intending illu-sively; by this same *docta ignorantia*; of which, many learned leaders of the Minde, are guilty [...]. The common source or sinke of the vulgar; prevailing past the Nobility, and pietie, of humanity and Religion. By which, All sincere discipline, is dissolv'd, or corrupted[.]³⁰

The myth is thus taken as a warning against giving way to appetite: the desire to know (Pandora's *libido sciendi*) is explicitly linked with carnal desire – Epimetheus' desire for Pandora. If both characters are described as intemperate, Epimetheus is clearly the focus of the story, but Pandora is the passive and active cause of his transgression. By yielding to his appetite, man has lost the 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*) that both Augustine and Nicolas of Cusa had defined as the innate knowledge which cannot be acquired, and was given by God to Adam and Eve before the Fall – before it was lost because of their pride. This is a warning against prying into matters of faith beyond the limited pale of human understanding and spiritual imperfection. God being infinite and perfect, He cannot be known by finite and imperfect beings; accepting the 'learned ignorance' means recognizing that one's knowledge must stop short of God's immensity, and that one should not aim too high in mystical matters.

The myth of Pandora, however, was later reappropriated and interpreted as typically emblematic of female curiosity (and, incidentally, of the nefarious influence of women on men). In a seventeenth-century painting by Nicolas Régnier,³¹ for example, Pandora is clearly described as an allegory of vanity – vanity of knowledge, but more fundamentally the embodiment of sensual seduction; and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1878 iconic portrait of Pandora presents her as a *femme fatale*.³² But the myth is not, in fact, specifically about female curiosity in its original version. By yielding to his desire for Pandora, Epimetheus is guilty of accepting the poisoned gift, and allowing the disaster to happen. As in the story of Lamia told by Plutarch, the focus of the myth seems to be more on (male) sensual desires, of which Pandora and Lamia are both an embodiment and a cause.

As in Chapman's moralistic footnote, Pandora has often been described as a type for Eve. Such is the case with an emblematic mannerist painting by Jean Cousin, which makes the parallel explicit in a motto which gives the picture

30 Hesiod, *The Georgicks of Hesiod* 5 (n. 30).

31 Régnier Nicolas, *Allegory of Vanity-Pandora*, c. 1626, 173 × 140 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

32 Rossetti Dante Gabriel, *Pandora*, coloured chalks on paper, dated 1878, 100.8 × 66.7 cm, National Museums Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight).

its title: *Eva Prima Pandora*.³³ Although a main difference is that Eve was not created by God to punish man, both women were seen as dangerous temptresses, responsible for the Fall of man. As is the case with evil Pandora, Eve's yielding to the serpent and her responsibility in the original Fall created an enduring stigma for the 'weaker vessel', in St Paul's words. In his chapter on genesitic curiosity and gynocracy below, Yan Brailowsky shows how the power of sixteenth-century women rulers was linked to the original sin and often deemed dangerous, leading to new interpretations of *Genesis*. But in the narrative of the Fall, *Genesis* does not distinguish between what would be good and bad curiosity: it is intellectual curiosity (for the knowledge of good and evil) in general that is condemned, because it is intrinsically linked with sensuality. *Genesis* thus describes Eve as yielding to two forms of desire, both caused by visual perception: the sensual desire ('saw', 'good', 'pleasant to the eyes'), and the desire to become wise: 'When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat' (*Genesis* 3.6). These two forms of desire are both facets of the same irrepressible incontinence. The text of *Genesis* does not specifically designate Eve as the sole culprit for the original Fall. If her curiosity and sensuality are clearly at the origin of the transgression, the responsibility for the Fall is shared between Adam and Eve. As Milton remarks in *Paradise Lost* (1667),³⁴ Adam was not tempted by the serpent, and must have chosen

33 Cousin Jean, *Eva Prima Pandora*, c. 1550, 97 × 150 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

34 Eve has sometimes been interpreted as a budding intellectual, reasoning, arguing, debating (and sometimes even as a sophist, taking her cue from Satan), in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*. On the one hand, Milton's Eve is obviously attracted to the idea of knowledge and is outraged at being kept back from it when the serpent proves to her that God has been envious by not allowing: 'What forbids He but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise? [...] to us deni'd / This intellectual food, for beasts reserv'd?' (IX.756–68). But on the other, what drives her to eating the fruit is pride, her desire to become as a god, since the serpent is 'as Man' (710). Again, and as in the Bible, Milton's Eve is clearly not described as guilty alone; Adam is famously made to choose her over his immortality out of conjugal love:

However I with thee have fixed my lot,
 Certain to undergo like doom, if death
 Consort with thee, death is to me as life;
 So forcible within my heart I feel
 The bond of nature draw me to my own,
 My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
 Our state cannot be severed, we are one,
 One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself. (IX.952–9).

Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. J. Leonard (London: 2000) 210.

to follow Eve into sin – to what extent his choice was a free one had led to an intense polemic between Luther, Calvin and Erasmus among others. To conclude on this difficult point, one can suggest that curiosity (or the desire for knowledge) is not so much at stake in the narrative of the original Fall as disobedience and pride. It is to become ‘as gods’ that Eve eats of the fruit and encourages Adam to do likewise: ‘God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil’ (*Genesis* 3.5).

When Plutarch, Augustine, or Aquinas wrote about the dangers of excessive curiosity, they did not mention women as being more prone to it than men. When the Puritan divine William Perkins analyzed the causes of the Fall in the late sixteenth century, he attributed it to both Adam and Eve’s ‘discontentment [...] in the mind [...] that is curiositie, when a man resteth not satisfied with the measure of inward gifts received, aspires to search out such things as God would have kept secret’.³⁵ As far as the uses of mythology were concerned, if Pandora, Psyche or Lamia were used in the early modern period as common archetypes of curiosity, so were Acteon and Orpheus (to name but a few), who featured high in the literary and philosophical discourse of early modernity to emblemize the dangers of curiosity. And it was a woman, Queen Elizabeth I, who was encouraged to translate Plutarch’s essay on curiosity into English as an intellectual exercise.

Women and Curiosity as *libido sciendi*

It is clear that, in spite of the Judeo-Christian stigma of the original Fall, the philosophical and moral discourse of the early modern period did not systematically associate curiosity specifically with the female gender, contrary to popular wisdom. In fact, curiosity, and most especially intellectual curiosity, was not primarily attached to women, perhaps simply because women were usually kept away from intellectual pursuits and did not feature as such in philosophical discourse. In his chapter on curiosity in *Diversitez* (1610), the French Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus does not mention women, and neither does Francis Bacon in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1619) when he discusses the topic.³⁶

35 Quoted in Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy” 13.

36 Camus Jean-Pierre, *Les Diversitez de Messire Jean-Pierre Camus* (Lyon, Jean Pillehotte: 1610) 565; Bacon Francis, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (London, John Bill: 1619) 51–54 (Bacon’s emphasis).

In the latter work, Bacon warns men against the excess of curiosity, using Acteon and Pentheus as exempla, without even mentioning a single female exemplum, and he does not concern himself with female curiosity either:

The curiosity of Men, in prying into secrets, and coveting with an inde-screet desire to attein the knowledge of things forbidden, is set forth by the Ancients in two examples: the one of *Actæon*, the other of *Pentheus*.

Actæon having unawares, and as it were by chance beheld *Diana* naked, was turned into a Stag and devoured by his own Dogges.

And Pentheus climbing up into a tree, with a desire to bee a spectator of the hidden sacrifices of *Bacchus*, was stricken with such a kind of frensie, as that whatsoever he look't upon, he thought it alwaies double [...]

The first of the Fables pertains to the secrets of *Princes*: the second to divine mysteries.³⁷

Curiosity as the desire for knowledge (or *libido sciendi*) was implicitly considered as necessarily male, and was alone of interest to philosophers. It is when we turn to the moral literature of the period that we begin to see, perhaps, the contours of a misogynistic strategy, to demonize female intellectual curiosity, the better to valorize male intellectual pursuits. In her chapter in this volume, Armel Dubois-Nayt shows how the Tudor 'Querelles des femmes', a series of lively polemics across the Channel in the sixteenth century, paradoxically helped popularize issues of women's intellectual and spiritual agency in the period, while they were based on the explosion of a misogynistic tradition which turned women into monsters and curia. This is also an aspect touched on by Susan Wiseman in her chapter on the mermaid as an embodiment of female monstrosity in male discourse – at a time when mermaids were also paradoxically becoming objects of pre-scientific interest. Laura Levine, in her chapter on Shakespeare, shows how *Troilus and Cressida*, with its peculiar focus on an epistemological crux, can be read as an illustration of the dangers inherent in the titillation of curiosity (here male curiosity about women), and eventually as an allegorical representation of the dangers of theatrical illusion – largely in answer to the antitheatrical polemic raging at the time Shakespeare was writing.

The misogynistic tradition that condemns female curiosity is taken up in the moral literature of the period, and most obviously in conduct books designed for women. In a popular conduct book, *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), Richard Brathwaite thus defined female curiosity first as nosiness (the desire to

37 Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* 51–52.

peep), mentioned in the same breath as gossip: the virtuous lady should be 'no pryer into others actions, nor too censorious a reproover of others Directions';³⁸ and secondly, curiosity is also defined as excessive vanity in beautiful clothes:

[T]ell me, ye curious Dames, who hold it a derogation to your honour, to entertaine ought that is vulgar: whereto were Cloathes first ordained, but to cover that nakednesse which sinne brought, and to skreene that shame which the effect of sinne first wrought? The use of Apparell is not to dignifie the wearer, or adde more beauty to the Creature.³⁹

Similarly, in his attempt to explain why the first woman came to be deceived, John Brinsley laments women's taste for novelties, and in particular 'New Fashions in apparell'. In *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* (1645), he argues that this manifestation of woman's corrupt nature is the consequence of Eve's curiosity, defined as 'affecting of Novelties'.⁴⁰

Women who had an interest in science and literature in the seventeenth century, or were bold enough to encroach upon the male sphere were therefore often treated themselves as objects of curiosity, as monsters exposed to ridicule and irony. Lady Mary Wroth, for instance, Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney's niece, was famously accused of being a 'hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster' by Edward Denny, for publishing a romance in her lifetime and under her own name.⁴¹ Laetitia Coussement-Boillot shows in her chapter that Wroth fought hard to assert her legitimacy as an author, and that part of her strategy was to stage a rehabilitation of female curiosity in her romance. As Line Cottegnies shows in her chapter, Denny's attempt at shaming Wroth publicly served as a lesson for Margaret Cavendish, who remembered the anecdote in the 1660s,⁴² and chose to provoke and gall her readers with engraved

38 Brathwaite Richard, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, B. Alsop and T. Fawcett: 1631) 7.

39 Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* 27.

40 Brinsley John, *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* (London, John Field: 1645) 12–14. The German word for curiosity, 'Neugier' (literally, the desire for what is new), underlines the inherent association between curiosity and novelty.

41 Denny Edward, "To Pamphilia from the Father-in-law of Seralius" (1621), quoted in Hannay M.P., *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Burlington: 2010) 235. Denny thought that he, his daughter and his son-in-law had been defamed in Wroth's *Urania* (London, John Marriott and John Grismand: 1621).

42 Cavendish Margaret, *Sociable Letters* (London, William Wilson: 1664) 50: 'It may be said to me, as one said to a Lady, *Work, Lady, Work, let writing Books alone, For surely Wiser Women ne'r writ one* [...]' ("To His Excellency the Lord Marquess of Newcastle" – Cavendish's emphasis).

frontispieces of herself, but also with an endless series of defiant prefaces in each of her volumes, rather than adopting the modest, low profile that was expected from a woman. In her first book, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), Cavendish explained that her interest in natural philosophy was precisely a way to avoid gossip and to direct women's curiosity towards a more acceptable and decent object: 'I thought this was the *harmelessest Pastime*: for sure this *Worke* is better than to sit still, and censure my *Neighbours actions* [...], or to busie my selfe out of the *Sphear* of our *Sex*, as in *Politicks of State*, or to preach *false Doctrine* in a Tub'.⁴³ Cavendish argues that natural philosophy suits women because their enquiry into the workings of nature is more noble than tattling or eavesdropping, and it is more legitimate than their encroaching upon men's political sphere. Yet, in return, Cavendish was treated as a mad woman by her contemporaries. Samuel Pepys, for instance, thought her 'conceited, mad', yet was always eager to watch each of her public appearances from a distance.⁴⁴ In fact, as Cottagnies shows, Cavendish paradoxically responded to her contemporaries' taste for scandal by literally fashioning herself into an object of curiosity. Other women intellectuals of her time were embarrassed by Cavendish's garrulous assertiveness, such as Dorothy Osborne or Mary Evelyn, who were both extremely critical of Cavendish.⁴⁵ Contrary to Cavendish, Sarah Hutton shows in her chapter that her contemporary Anne Conway, a philosopher in her own rights, was held in high esteem by philosophers of her time, probably because she was as modest as Cavendish was ostentatious. Conway helps us understand how some form of philosophical enquiry or intellectual curiosity could be seen as valid for women who behaved as inquisitive pupils in what has been described as the 'age of curiosity'.⁴⁶ It might be argued as a consequence of Cavendish's obvious idiosyncracies that she is not *representative* of the relations between women and curiosity in the seventeenth century. However, as a woman philosopher and avant-gardist, and perhaps like Anne Conway in this respect, the Duchess of Newcastle expresses women's *libido sciendi* in the context of the emergence of empiricism in England.

As Laetitia Coussement-Boillot and Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand convincingly show in their chapters, Mary Wroth and Madeleine de Scudéry are two

43 Cavendish Margaret, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, J. Martin and J. Allestrye: 1653) sig. A5^r (Cavendish's emphasis).

44 Pepys Samuel, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. R. Latham – W. Matthews (London: 1974) 11 vols., vol. 9, 123; vol. 8, 196.

45 Whitaker K., *Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Royalist, Writer & Romantic* (London: 2004) 159–160.

46 Evans – Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* 9.

eloquent examples (across the Channel) of the representation and uses of curiosity by early modern women writers in their literary works. They show in particular how the genres of the novel and the novella were used to enhance the protagonists' as well as the readers' curiosity. In Wroth's case, the aim was to promote a positive form of female curiosity, while condemning women's bad curiosity, in particular their craze for novelties, including romances. Lallemant contends in particular that Scudéry's interest in the subject of curiosity is linked with her creative shift from long novel to novella.

Finally, this book deals with another category of curious women, that of collectors who owned a cabinet of curiosities, represented here by two eighteenth-century figures, the Duchess of Portland and Mme Thiroux d'Arconville. Beth Tobin's and Adeline Gargam's chapters show that not only did these women own their own cabinets in respectively England and France, but they had organized collections and were not mere amateurs. Three categories of curious women emerge, therefore, from the chapters presented in this book: women philosophers, women authors (in genres that would have been described as literary), and women collectors may be recognized as the main expressions of women's relations to curiosity in the intellectual sphere from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Although some women found a way to act on their desire for knowledge by writing books or collecting curiosities, women were still denied a proper academic education all along the early modern period. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the philosopher Mary Astell still deplored the reputation associated with female education and learned women, treated as monsters, and repressed. Comparing the education of boys and girls, she comments:

[Girls] are restrain'd, frown'd upon, and beat, not *for*, but *from* the Muses; Laughter and Ridicule that never-failing Scare-Crow is set up to drive them from the Tree of Knowledge. But if, in spite of all Difficulties Nature prevails, and they can't be kept so ignorant as their Masters wou'd have them, they are star'd upon as Monsters, Censur'd, Envy'd, and every way Discouraged [...]⁴⁷

Perhaps an echo of Descartes' image of knowledge as a tree,⁴⁸ it also conjures up the emblem of the metaphysical curse of women, and represents a departure from its traditional association with the sinful nature of woman. Here the

47 Astell Mary, *Political Writings*, ed. P. Springborg (Cambridge: 1996) 28.

48 Descartes' tree of knowledge is presented in the 'letter-preface' to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy*.

tree of knowledge represents education, intellectual pursuit, and knowledge which should be shared equally by men and women, but has been 'so long unjustly monopolized' by the former – a striking reversal of the theological curse. Mary Astell, a philosopher who published a project for a female college,⁴⁹ was deeply influenced by Descartes and Locke, who had described reason as universal. As Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin and Christophe Martin both show in their essays in this volume, cartesianism was key in opening up alleys for female intellectuals. Pellegrin's article highlights the difference between the moralists and the followers of Descartes: moralists condemned women's excessive curiosity because it was applied to unfit objects, or objects that were deemed unfit for women. But for Cartesian philosophers, it was the method, or lack of it, that made it possible to distinguish between good and bad curiosity. For Malebranche, for instance, curiosity is not bad in itself, but must be guided by reason, especially given how dangerous female imagination is. For Poulain de la Barre, curiosity must also be guided by reason, but women are somehow less prone to bad curiosity because they have been preserved by the ignorance in which they have been kept. Martin shows how two other paradigms appeared towards the late seventeenth century: one that rehabilitates female curiosity by a radical disqualifying of the so-called 'natural' curiosity of women, or, as with Fontenelle, the idea that one should rely on the intrinsic energy of women's curious drive, as an instrument for their emancipation, but also, perhaps, for the emancipation of philosophy itself.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Judith Drake, who was strongly influenced by Astell, reclaimed for women a noble form of female curiosity, which was for her the legitimate pursuit of all kinds of knowledge, without exception:

The numberless Treatises of Antiquities, Philosophy, Mathematicks Natural, and other History (in which I can't pass silently by, that learned One of Sir *Walter Raleigh*, which the World he writ of can't match) written originally in, or translated to our Tongue are sufficient to lead us a great way into any Science our Curiosity shall prompt us to.⁵⁰

So by the end of the seventeenth century, more and more voices were heard to call for a proper female education and for legitimizing intellectual curiosity for women. This was in the face of male oppositional discourse, such as Fénelon's patronizing scepticism about girls' abilities, and their propensity to

49 [Astell Mary], *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of her Sex* (London, R. Wilkin: 1694).

50 [Drake Judith], *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London, for A. Roper: 1696) 54.

bad curiosity, or Thomas Wright's devastatingly satirical bouts against learned women in the comedy, *The Female Virtuoso's*, an adaptation of Molière's *Femmes savantes* published in 1693.

The Ambivalence of Women's Relation to Curiosity

The comparison between France and England, two countries with strong intellectual ties but different political and religious traditions, ensures that no 'grand narrative' about the history of female curiosity can be built from the chapters that follow. A first apparent contradiction emerges when one confronts Neil Kenny's assertion, reiterated in his chapter here, that women were increasingly associated with bad curiosity, on the one hand, and the relatively large number of women who owned cabinets of curiosities in eighteenth-century France, on the other. Or does this apparent contradiction reveal national differences? Were women accepted as legitimate actors of the culture of curiosity in France, while remaining associated with bad curiosity in England? No such conclusion can be drawn, however. First, it should not be too hastily deduced from examples of women collectors in the eighteenth century that there was an evolution towards a legitimization of women's curiosity: what women's cabinets show is merely the extraordinary boom of curiosity as a cultural practice in a European context. It might even be argued that cabinets of curiosities had always been considered a female practice: particularly relevant in this regard is Margaret Cavendish's statement that cabinets of curiosities are an 'effeminate practice': describing the ideal commonwealth, she explains that its ruler should 'have none of those they call their cabinets, which is a room filled with all useless curiosities, which seems Effeminate, and is so expensive [...] almost to the impoverishing of a Kingdome'. She adds that books, on the contrary, are 'more famous curiosities'.⁵¹ Cavendish may here have been expressing a common view of the time, which probably found its origin in the belief that women's craze for fashion and clothes was in itself some kind of collection. In this case, it is not surprising that women should be allowed to have their own cabinets, and that women's cabinets of curiosities should not be interpreted as evidence of a rehabilitation of female curiosity. The second reason why the national opposition does not stand is that, in the seventeenth century, English natural philosophers such as Robert Boyle encouraged women to carry out experiments by themselves, thus illustrating the principle of the

51 Cavendish Margaret, *The World's Olio* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1655) 207. See Cottagnies, below, for Cavendish's desire not to be associated with curiosities.

openness of English empiricism.⁵² English experimentalism encouraged collective work, as opposed to the secrecy of alchemical practices. A new category of natural philosophers thus appeared: amateurs who had never been taught at university and who dabbled in science at a time when the new experimental approach gave natural philosophy a ludic dimension. Natural philosophy also became a fashionable activity.⁵³ As a consequence of gentlemen amateurs entering the scientific world, new rules were applied: knowledge and results of experiments had to be shared, using complex scientific terms was frowned upon, and modesty was praised. These principles were part of a gentleman's code appropriated by seventeenth-century natural philosophers in England.⁵⁴ To a certain extent, the new 'openness of manners'⁵⁵ in science, imposed by gentlemen's civility, was beneficial to women, although they were not explicitly encouraged to join this new category of natural philosophers. This may be why English women philosophers were not mere 'salonnières'. Their desire for knowledge was prompted by Cartesianism, as was that of French women philosophers, but in England Descartes' strong influence was superimposed onto the openness of experimentalism.

Even though no linear evolution of women's relation to curiosity in England and France can be established, a few conclusions can be drawn from the chapters in this book. First, there is no denying the persistence, in both countries, of a distinction in people's minds between a good and a bad curiosity, and the common association of women with bad curiosity, as a persistent legacy of

52 In his preface to *Experiments and Considerations touching Colours* (London, Henry Herringman: 1664), Robert Boyle wrote about experiments on colours: '[...] the wonder, some of these Trifles have been wont to produce in all sorts of Beholders, and the access they have sometimes gain'd ev'n to the Closets of Ladies, seem to promise that since the subject is so pleasing, that the Speculation appears as Delightful as Difficult, such easie and recreative Experiments, which require but little time, or charge, or trouble in the making, and when made are sensible and surprizing enough, may contribute more than others [...] to recommend those parts of Learning (Chemistry and Corpuscular Philosophy) by which they have been produc'd' (sig. A4^r). Boyle was looking for supporters of the experimental philosophy, and it appears that women's support was most welcome.

53 For example, in 1655, William Cavendish wrote: 'it is *A-la-mode* to Write of Natural Philosophy' in a preface to Margaret Cavendish's *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, John Martin & James Allestrye: 1655).

54 Shapin S., *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago – London: 1994) xvii.

55 Johns A., "History, Science, and the History of the Book: The Making of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England", *Publishing History* 30 (1991) 5–30 (9).

Eve's fatal inquisitiveness. Christophe Martin shows in his chapter how explicit this opposition was in late seventeenth-century France. Bad, female curiosity was obvious in women's natural tendency to gossip and in their fascination for novelties. However, the relations between women and curiosity were complex and ambivalent at any given time between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century as conflicting representations and perceptions cohabited. One reason for the ambivalence of the judgement on curiosity was the fact that curiosity was always gauged in relation to other variables, such as age, sex, rank and occupation, as Neil Kenny contends in his final chapter on curiosity and the social orders. Kenny shows the 'interconnectedness' of these variables, and therefore the complexity of the judgement on curiosity. He both takes as a premise and reassesses the idea, which he first put forward in his book *The Uses of Curiosity*, that the more female-oriented curiosity became, the more likely it was to be judged negatively, and he confronts this idea to a new evaluation of curiosity in which the other variables are also taken into account. Another reason is that curiosity was judged differently depending on the object of a woman's inquisitiveness. As Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin argues in her chapter, the object of curiosity as well as the mental faculty that a curious woman resorted to – whether it be imagination or reason – also determined the judgment on a woman's curiosity. The necessary combination of curiosity with other variables accounts for the contradictory statements on the relation of women to curiosity in early modern France and England. Thus women's interest in intellectual pursuits might be judged favourably in the case of the modest Anne Conway, while being strongly condemned in the case of the ostentatious Duchess of Newcastle – as Neil Kenny puts it in his chapter below, curiosity was judged according to 'decorum'. What emerges from these case studies and more general statements is that, in England and in France, the history of the relations between women and curiosity is primarily the history of a largely subjective and often gendered *judgement* on curiosity.

Armelle Dubois-Nayt's, Laura Levine's, and Susan Wiseman's chapters show that women were also the objects of *men's* curiosity: female sexuality and generation, monsters, and undefinable beings – women who did not act as was expected from them –, all aroused men's curiosity, which reveals that a study of women and curiosity is mainly a study of men's curiosity about women, and of men's frustration at not being able to fathom women. Many 'books of curiosities', encyclopedic treatises that were widely read in the period and often republished across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, testify to men's obsession with getting an exhaustive understanding of pregnancy and generation. These texts also focus on the consequences of women's behaviour during

their pregnancy on the child to be born.⁵⁶ The idea that women's imaginations could lead to the birth of monstrous children prevailed in the period, and well into the eighteenth century. To all these enquiries about women's reproductive functions, a similar answer is given, which draws upon Galenic medicine: women's humoral composition, their being cold and moist, is what accounts for all their idiosyncracies.⁵⁷ Male curiosity about generation and women's sexual functions was stimulated from the late Middle Ages by the belief that women possessed a hidden secret, that is knowledge concerning sexuality and generation that men longed for. This idea was inherited from a late thirteenth-early fourteenth-century treatise attributed to Albertus Magnus, *De Secretis Mulierum*.⁵⁸ Katharine Park has shown that understanding 'women's secrets' became one of the main objects of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century medical writers, hence the numerous dissections of female bodies that aimed at unveiling the secret of the uterus.⁵⁹ More interestingly perhaps, women themselves proved interested in curiosity, in the observation of curiosity in others and in themselves, as appears from Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand's, Laetitia Coussement-Boillot's and Line Cottagnies's chapters on Scudéry, Wroth and Cavendish, three women who were curious about curiosity, whose manifestations they acutely observed and transcribed in their literary works. Women could thus also become the objects of their own curiosity.⁶⁰

56 See for example Basset Robert, *Curiosities; or the Cabinet of Nature* (London, N. and I. Oakes: 1637) 18, 19, 24; Lupton Thomas, *A Thousand Notable Things, Containing Modern Curiosities* (London, G. Conyers: 1706) 12, 14. See also the periodical *The British Apollo* (London, T. Sanders: 1711) 225.

57 See for example Basset, *Curiosities* 12.

58 See Lemay H.R., *Women's Secrets. A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany: 1992).

59 Park, *Secrets of Women* 25.

60 In particular, women's curiosity for their own bodies became a common theme in the eighteenth century. Women's self exploration is thus reflected in Gillray's portrait of female curiosity, which shows a woman staring at her buttocks in a mirror (1778), while a similar image is described in *A Court Lady's Curiosity; or, the Virgin undress'd* (1741). See Benedict, *Curiosity* 152, 154.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Astell Mary, *Political Writings*, ed. P. Springborg (Cambridge: 1996).
- [Astell Mary], *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of her Sex* (London, R. Wilkin: 1694).
- Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E. Bouverie Pusey (Chicago: 2007).
- (St. Augustin), *De vera religione*, in *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, t. 8, Bibliothèque augustinienne (Turnhout, 1982).
- Bacon Francis, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. J.M. Robertson (Abingdon – New York: 1905).
- , *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (London, John Bill: 1619).
- Basset Robert, *Curiosities; or the Cabinet of Nature* (London, N. and I. Okes: 1637).
- Boyle Robert, *Experiments and Considerations touching Colours* (London, Henry Herringman: 1664).
- Brathwaite Richard, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, Bernard Alsop and Thomas Fawcett: 1631).
- Brinsley John, *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* (London, John Field: 1645).
- Camus Jean-Pierre, *Les Diversitez de Messire Jean-Pierre Camus* (Lyon, Jean Pillehotte: 1610).
- Cavendish Margaret, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, John Martin & James Allestrye: 1653).
- , *The World's Olio* (London, John Martin & James Allestrye: 1655).
- , *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, John Martin & James Allestrye: 1655).
- , *Sociable Letters* (London, William Wilson: 1664).
- Descartes René, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* [*Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, first published 1701], in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. and eds. J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch (Cambridge: 1985) vol. 1.
- , *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light* [*La Recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle*, first published 1701], in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. and eds. J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch (Cambridge: 1985) vol. 2.
- [Drake Judith], *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London, for A. Roper: 1696).
- Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* [1689], ed. B. Jolibert (Paris: 1994).
- Hall Joseph, *Contemplations upon the Principall Passages of the Holy Storie. The First Volume* (London, M. Bradwood: 1612).
- Hesiod, *The Georgicks of Hesiod, by George Chapman; translated elaborately out of the Greek*, trans. G. Chapman (London, Miles Partrick: 1618).
- Hume David, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, John Noon: 1739).

- La Fontaine Jean de, "Psyché", in *Oeuvres de Monsieur de la Fontaine, nouvelle édition* (n. l., Jacob and Henry Sauvage: 1726) t. 3, 93.
- Locke John, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (London, A. and J. Churchill: 1693).
- Lupton Thomas, *A Thousand Notable Things, Containing Modern Curiosities* (London, G. Conyers: 1706).
- Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. J. Leonard (London: 2000).
- Pepys Samuel, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. R. Latham – W. Matthews (London: 1974).
- Plutarch, *On Curiosity*, trans. M. Wheeler, ed. W.W. Goodwin (Boston: 1878).
- Ripa Cesare, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems*, trans. P. Tempest (London, Benjamin Motte: 1709).
- Rowlands Samuel, *Tis Merry When Gossips Meete* (London, W. W[hite]: 1602).
- , *A Whole Crew of Kind Gossips, All Met to Be Merry* (London, W. Iaggard for John Deane: 1609).
- The British Apollo* (London, T. Sanders: 1711).
- Wroth Mary, *Urania* (London, John Marriott and John Grismand: 1621).

Secondary Sources

- Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001).
- Blumenberg H., *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: 1986).
- Capp B., *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 2003).
- Cottegnies L. – Parageau S. – Venet G. (eds.), *Curiosité(s) et vanité(s) dans les îles Britanniques et en Europe (xvi^e–xvii^e siècles)*, *Études Épistémè* 27 (2015).
- Coudreuse A., "Justine ou les bonheurs de la curiosité", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido Sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998).
- Daston L. – Park K. (eds.), *Wonders and the Order of Nature 150–1750* (New York: 1998).
- Evans R.J.W. – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: 2006).
- Findlen P., *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 1994).
- Hannay M.P., *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Burlington: 2010).
- Harrison P., "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England", *Isis* 92 (2001) 265–290.
- Hindle S., "The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in Early Modern England", *Continuity and Change* 9 (1994) 391–419.
- Johns A., "History, Science, and the History of the Book: The Making of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England", *Publishing History* 30 (1991) 5–30.
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).

- Lemay H.R., *Women's Secrets. A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany: 1992).
- Park K., "Dissecting the Female Body: From Women's Secrets to the Secrets of Nature", in Donawerth J. – Seeff A. (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries. Attending to Early Modern Women* (Cranbury, N.J.: 2000) 29–47.
- , *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation and the Origin of Human Dissection* (New York: 2006).
- Pomian K., *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1987).
- Thiselton-Dyer T.F. (ed.), *Folk-Lore of Women* [1906] (Los Angeles: 2010).
- Shapin S., *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago – London: 1994).
- Whitaker K., "The Culture of Curiosity", in Jardine N. – Secord J.A. – Spary E.C. (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: 1996) 75–90.
- , *Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Royalist, Writer & Romantic* (London: 2004).

From Genesitic Curiosity to Dangerous Gynocracy in Sixteenth-Century England

Yan Brailowsky

The decade between 1550 and 1560 was a particular period in Western European history: many monarchies in the region were led by women, either as queens (Mary Tudor in England, Mary Stuart in Scotland) or regents (Catherine de' Medici in France, Joanna of Austria in Spain, Catherine of Austria in Portugal). To this list, one could add other female figures acting as kings, such as Mary of Hungary, also known as Mary of Austria, who was governor of the Spanish Netherlands from 1531 to 1555. This situation was unheard of; for some, it was even monstrous, unnatural, contumely to God. To all effects and purposes, gynocracy or gynecocracy, 'the rule by women', was as a sixteenth-century 'curiosity', an exceptional, singular, odd, novel situation.¹ This may explain why gynocracy gave rise to a heated discussion reaching back to the origins of mankind, i.e. the Book of Genesis, particularly with Eve's appetite for knowledge – another meaning of 'curious'² – which famously led to man's Fall. As this essay contends, in the eyes of many writers in the sixteenth century, the perils of gynocracy were linked with Genesitic curiosity, women's power with the pursuit of forbidden knowledge, original sin with death.

Women and Genesitic Curiosity

To underline the link between Eve and epistemology, on the one hand, and the link between the consequences of her action, i.e. her subjection to her husband, and sixteenth-century political theory, on the other, one must start from the beginning. In the beginning, 'the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be himself alone; I will make him a help meet for him' (Ge 2.18).³ A few

1 Sense 11.16.a of 'curious' in the *OED*.

2 Sense 1.5.a in the *OED*.

3 Unless noted otherwise, all Biblical quotes are from the Authorized Version (1611). Similarly, unless noted otherwise, all emphasis in Biblical quotes is mine.

verses later, man's 'help', Eve, is tempted by the serpent and she tastes of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

As recalled by Philip Almond, most early modern writers and theologians attributed the Fall to man's curiosity, among a host of other sins.⁴ In *The Historie of Adam* (1606), for instance, Henry Holland lists curiosity as the third sin committed by Adam and Eve: for 'they seeke after strange knowledge, not contented with Gods holy word'.⁵ A similar point was made by Elnathan Parr in *The Grounds of Divinitie* (1615) and Edward Leigh in *A Systeme or Bodie of Divinitie* (1654).⁶ Other writers, however, singled out woman's agency in the Fall. In his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1638), Robert Burton compares Adam's transgression with Pandora's box, linking the androcentric Biblical account with the gynocentric Greek myth.⁷ In *Hexapla in Genesin* (1633), Andrew Willet goes one step further, arguing that Eve's curiosity is the fruit of her desire, further linking this desire with her vain hunger for knowledge: 'The woman seeth the tree to be good for meat, there is her voluptuous desire: *pleasant to the eyes*, there is her curiosity: and to be desired for knowledge, there is the vanity of her minde'.⁸

This reading would have been influenced by several translations of Ge 3.6, in which what constitutes man's original sin is revealingly described as the linking of desire with knowledge. In the 1561 Geneva Bible, the verse is rendered thus: 'So the woman (seeing that the tree was good for meat, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and *a tree to be desired to get knowledge*) took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat'. In the 1611 Authorized Version: 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and *a tree to be desired to make one wise*, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat'. Interestingly, other, earlier versions of this verse do not emphasize the idea of knowledge. The Vulgate, for instance, is descriptive: 'quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque

4 Almond P.C., *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: 2008) 194.

5 Holland Henry, *The Historie of Adam, or the foure-fold state of man, vwell formed in his creation, deformed in his corruption, reformed in Grace, and perfected in glory* (London, T[homas] E[ast] for Thomas Man: 1606) 10.

6 Almond, *Adam and Eve* 194–195.

7 Burton Richard, *The Anatomy of Melancholy: What it Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Seuerall Cures of it* (London, Henry Cripps: 1638) 1.1.2.

8 Willet Andrew, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum: that is, a sixfold commentary upon the two first bookes of Moses, being Genesis and Exodus Wherein these translations are compared together* (London, John Haviland: 1633) 29. Emphasis in the original.

delectabile'. The Wycliffe Bible translates this nearly verbatim, speaking of a 'tree [which] was good, and sweet to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful in beholding'.

After this transgression, God addresses both Adam and Eve, punishing them in turn. Again, Eve's desire comes into the picture, this time to dictate its subjection to her husband: 'thy desire shall be subject to thy husband, and *he shall rule over thee*' (Ge 3.16). In the verse immediately following, God berates Adam for listening to his wife: 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake' (17) and so on. In other words, in the Genesitic account of the beginning of mankind, mankind is punished for having gained the knowledge of good and evil; Eve's subordination to her husband is a punishment for her sin; and knowledge and curiosity are intimately linked with desire and subjection. This reading raises a number of issues.

First, theologians were divided on the question of whether Eve is *naturally*, or only momentarily subordinate. Luther and Calvin, for instance, seemed to hesitate between the two notions.⁹ *Genesis* does not say that women are inherently weaker than man, although the idea is present elsewhere in the Bible. Rather, God says Eve is subordinate *to her husband as a consequence of her transgression*. It does not suggest that her subjection should extend to fathers, brothers and kinsmen, for instance; nor does it suggest that she was subjected to Adam before the Fall. This distinction between natural or absolute, and historical or contextual subjection is of consequence for early modern writers who distinguished the body natural (the perishable flesh which is liable to 'desire') and the body politic (the eternal soul which 'rule[s]' over men).

Secondly, the question remains whether knowledge, and the pursuit thereof, is naturally sinful, or a remembrance of the original sin, or whether once acquired, knowledge should be *used* and even desired to improve man's fallen state. God punishes Adam and Eve for their transgression, but this does not necessarily mean that he condemns knowledge *per se*. This point will be important for humanists and reformists who called on the Church to educate its flock and clergy in order to avoid heresies which could imperil

9 Mattox M.L., "Luther on Eve, Women, and the Church", in Wengert T.J. (ed.), *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids – Cambridge: 2009) 260–263. See also Thompson J.L., *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries* (Geneva: 1992) 108–128. Thompson also briefly lists the customary patristic readings of the reasons for the Fall, and Eve's role in it.

one's salvation.¹⁰ In other words, the thirst or desire for knowledge is not necessarily sinful.

Finally, an analysis of the Genesitic account should ask whether God had planned the Fall all along to underline the perils of rebellion and ill-gotten knowledge, stressing the virtues of obedience to authority, however tyrannous, whimsical or arbitrary. The notion that God had foreknowledge that Adam and Eve would be tempted even before He created Eve is suggested by theologians like St Augustine in his *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*. As noted by Angelamatilde Capodivacca, 'Although Eve had not yet been created when God gave the warning not to eat the forbidden fruit, He formulated this warning in the plural, anticipating Eve's fall':¹¹

[T]he conclusion of the commandment clearly shows it was not addressed just to one person; what he says, you see, is this: *but on the day you all take a bite from it, you all shall die the death* (Ge 2.17). He is already starting on the explanation of how the woman came to be made, and how she is said to have been made as a help for the man [...]¹²

Augustine goes on to suggest that the creation of woman was made to show how man must 'subject the soul's appetite or desire', i.e. woman, to 'the interior mind [...] manly reason'. The point is important for thinkers who claimed that, although gynocracy was unnatural, the situation may have been willed by God and that man owed obedience to divinely ordained rulers, good or evil. In an English context, the issue is compounded by the adoption of Calvinism in the second half of the sixteenth century, and its attendant belief in predestination.

Knox and the 'Monstrosity' of Gynocracy

This Biblical context and the issues it raises inform many of the early modern debates on the link between Eve's curiosity and the dangers of gynocracy. These discussions were not new. As recalled by Neil Kenny and others, for centuries 'woman' and 'curiosity' were virtually a pleonasm: 'not for nothing

10 The point is made, *inter alia*, by Augustine in his *On Christian Learning*.

11 Capodivacca A., *Curiosity and the Trials of the Imagination in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: 2007) 48.

12 Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. E. Hill, O.P., ed. J.E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: 2002) 11 11, 15. Sixteenth-century translations used the pronoun *thou*.

is *curiositas* a feminine noun'.¹³ A Shakespearean-styled quip could posit that 'curiosity, thy name is woman'.

Discussions over the virtues and dangers of gynocracy had developed since the publication of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames* and the so-called *querelle des femmes* in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Typical views on women included those of Machiavelli who claimed in *The Discourses* (1531) that women were invariably the harbingers of chaos:

we see that women have been the cause of great dissensions and much ruin to states, and have caused great damage to those that govern them. We have seen, in the history of Rome, that the outrage committed upon Lucretia deprived the Tarquins of their throne, and the attempt upon Virginia caused the Decemvirs the loss of their authority. Thus, Aristotle mentions as one of the first causes of the ruin of tyrants the outrages committed by them upon the wives and daughters of others, either by violence or seduction; [...] absolute princes and rulers of republics [therefore] [...] should well reflect upon the disorders that may arise from such causes.¹⁵

What was new in the sixteenth century was the historical context mentioned earlier, one which explains why John Knox published his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women* while in exile in Geneva in 1558. Knox's famous pamphlet seemed to illustrate common beliefs on the dangers of female rule. Speaking in 'most plain and few words', he began his 'First Blast' with the following declaration:

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a

13 Happel, quoted by Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 384.

14 Levin C. – Sullivan P.A. (eds.), *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women* (Albany: 1995). On early modern discussions on gynocracy, see, among others, Jordan C., "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought", *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, 3 (1987) 421–451; Jansen S.L., *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: 2002); Levin C. – Carney J.E. – Barrett-Graves D. (eds.), *High and Mighty Queens' of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* (New York: 2003); Wanegffelen T., *Le Pouvoir contesté: souveraines d'Europe à la Renaissance* (Paris: 2008).

15 Book 3, chap. 26, quoted by Jankowski T.A., *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana: 1992) 56.

thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.¹⁶

The pamphlet goes on to justify this opening salvo by developing each idea in succession. In the course of his pamphlet, Knox used arguments from Aristotle and Augustine. From the Greek philosopher he took the notion of natural order, 'an immutable order of ranks, excluding women from powerful stations'.¹⁷ Women being 'naturally' weak, like the blind, they ought not to rule, 'For who can deny but it repugneth to nature, that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see?'¹⁸ From the bishop of Hippo, Knox took Biblical proof, citing Ge 3, 1 Tim, and 1 Cor. For Augustine, 'the man rules and the woman obeys: the Fall recurs each time this hierarchy is overturned'.¹⁹ Further, Augustine underlines women's paradoxical nature, both curious and skeptical, interpreting Ge 3.4–5 as follows:

Then the serpent told the woman that she would not die. *God forbade it only because He knew that on the day you eat it your eyes will open and, then, you will be like gods*, having the knowledge of good and evil. How could the woman ever believe these words that told her that God had forbidden something good and useful unless she already had inherent in her mind that love for an independent authority and an arrogant presumption of herself – thus it was she who was to be condemned and punished through this temptation. Not being satisfied by the serpent's words, Eve examined the tree.²⁰

Albeit Knox's reasoning was mostly rooted in Biblical history, which was supposed to lend it an absolute, timeless authority, the English-language publication was aimed at two particular, pernicious and contemporary examples obtaining in the British Isles: that of Mary of Guise, the Scottish regent, and Mary I, the murderous English Queen who persecuted her subjects and concluded a dangerous alliance with Catholic Spain – a woman who behaved, in short, as a modern-day Jezabel. Similar remarks were made by

16 Knox John, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women* (Geneva, [J. Poullain and A. Rebul]: 1558) 9^r. Spelling modernized.

17 Chavura S.A., *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden – Boston: 2011) 64.

18 Knox, *First Blast* 9^r.

19 Augustine, *On Genesis* 11 11, 15.

20 *De Genesi ad Literam* XI 30, 11, quoted by Capodivacca, *Curiosity* 48.

Christopher Goodman in a pamphlet published in Geneva earlier the same year, sparking a series of misogynist treatises.²¹

Knox's pamphlet was ill-timed, however, as Mary died just a few months after the publication of *The First Blast*, to be succeeded by *another* woman, Elizabeth I. Understandably, the new queen was not amused by the fiery Scottish pamphleteer, and Knox was never to be pardoned. He did not set foot in England, his adoptive land, again.

Knox attempted to distance himself from his own work, repeatedly arguing that he was speaking of Mary and that he welcomed Elizabeth's accession as a sign of the workings of divine Providence. In point of fact, his private letters are 'free of gendered rhetoric', encouraging women to be critical and independent,²² and his pamphlet was in great part aimed at justifying rebellion against tyranny, rather than against female rulers *per se*.²³ But his insistence in *The First Blast* on women's *gender*, railing in his Preface against 'this monstiferous empire of women, (which amongst all enormities, that this day do abound upon the face of the whole earth, is most detestable and damnable)', precluded mitigating interpretations of his analysis in the eyes of the new queen.²⁴ Half-lucidly, he had foreseen such persecution, using the term 'curious' as one who is 'Unduly minute or inquisitive' (*OED*, sense I.10.a) when he claimed that he would 'be called foolish, curious, spiteful, and a sower of sedition: and one day perchance (although now I be nameles) I may be attainted of treason'.²⁵

Knox's insistence on the 'monstrosity' of women's rule was perhaps his own, and what *he* viewed as monstrous was for others simply something odd, an exception – a curiosity in the *other* sense.²⁶ This is what other reformers on

21 Goodman Christopher, *How superior powers ought to be obeyd of their subiects and wherin they may lawfully by Gods Worde be disobeyed and resisted. Wherin also is declared the cause of all this present miserie in England, and the onely way to remedy the same* (Geneva, John Crispin: 1558).

22 Felch S.M., "The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, 4 (1995) 805–822, and "Deir Sister": The Letters of John Knox to Anne Vaughan Lok", *Renaissance and Reformation* 19, 4 (1995) 47–68.

23 Dubois-Nayt A., "La tyrannie travestie, ou le genre au service du tyrannicide", *Cercles* 16, 2 (2006) 33–43, and "La différence des sexes": construction et fonction du 'genre' dans la pensée politique de John Knox", *Cités* 34, 2 (2008) 163–164, 168–169.

24 Knox, *First Blast* 5^r.

25 Knox, *First Blast* 7^v.

26 In the words of Constance Jordan, 'within certain limits what Knox terms monstrous exceptions to nature must be reclassified as simply uncommon; that is, twins are uncommon but not monsters', Jordan, "Woman's Rule" 438.

the Continent argued when they tried to distinguish themselves from Knox. As recalled by John Lee Thompson, Calvin, like Knox, ruled in favor of women's subordination. However, the Genevan preacher had a different strategy than that of Knox, distinguishing canon and civil interpretations of female rule:

[Calvin] tried to distance himself from Knox, first by dedicating the second edition of his commentary on Isaiah to Elizabeth, then by writing a conciliatory letter to her secretary, William Cecil. [...] In both letters, Calvin makes clear his belief that women's rule is contrary to the legitimate order of nature and is sent by God to punish the indolence of men; [...] but Calvin will not counsel revolt against a woman ruler any more than he would consider rebelling against a tyrant: 'Private persons have no right to do anything but to deplore [such rule]. Indeed, gynecocracy – like tyranny – is a bad arrangement which must be tolerated until God sees fit to overthrow it'. [...] For Calvin, female rule – whether that of Mary Tudor or Elizabeth – always remained a kind of tyranny and, as such, it was to be neither welcomed nor resisted; it was only to be endured.²⁷

Similarly, as made clear in his *Sermon on the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians* (on Eph. 5.21–5), Calvin argued that women ought to bear their subjection with equanimity rather than rebellion. Their subordination was the divine punishment for Eve's curiosity, something women were called on never to forget. According to Calvin:

there is no other shift but that women must stoop and understand that the ruin and confusion of mankind came in on their side, and through them we be all forlorn and accursed and banished the kingdom of heaven: when women do understand that all this came of Eve and of womankind (as St Paul telleth us in another place [1 Tim. 2.14]), there is none other way but for them to stoop and bear patiently the subjection that God hath laid upon them, which is nothing else but a warning to them to keep themselves lowly and mild.²⁸

27 Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* 50, 52. Knox's book was published by Jean Crespin's press in Geneva, i.e. the same press which published Calvin's works. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought* 64, and Pettegree A., *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies* (Aldershot: 1996) 145–146.

28 Calvin John, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [1577], trans. A. Golding (Edinburgh: 1973) 569.

Celebrating Eve

As noted by contemporaries who wrote books in *defence* of gynocracy, such as Laurence Humphrey, John Aylmer or Henry Howard, Knox's arguments were contradictory.²⁹ To take but one example, his argument of the 'immutable rank and order – man above woman – is immediately contradicted by his other belief in God's full control over all things'.³⁰ Others went further, defending Eve's transgression as a reason to celebrate *life*, rather than death, as in a 1591 sermon on Ge 2.18 ('The Creation of Eve') by bishop Lancelot Andrewes at St Paul's Cathedral:

But if any shall complain yet further of the woman's hurt and fault; let us know that this woman was made by the counsel of God, the means and occasion by which amends was made, and that with advantage for the evil, for all the evil which she had first done, for as she brought forth sin and death, so she was a means to bring forth a holy seed, which should bring eternal righteousness and life unto all, for as the Serpent should deceive the woman: So it was God's purpose, that the seed of woman should destroy the Serpent and his works; wherefore we must not so much with grief marvel that the woman's sin was made the occasion of all our misery, as with joy and comfort to wonder, that God made the seed of the woman to save us from sin, and to bring us to felicity.³¹

This benevolent interpretation of Genesis found additional support in readings which sought to contextualize the Biblical model. John Aylmer, in his

29 Caney A., "Let He Who Objects Produce Sound Evidence: Lord Henry Howard and the Sixteenth-Century Gynocracy Debate", *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations* 97 (2004), and Shephard A., *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: the Knox debate* (Keele: 1994).

30 Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought* 67. Knox is countered in this sense by Laurence Humphrey, who claimed: 'There is a fixed order, both a state of things and an ordering of kingdoms. Nor are states constituted first of all without laws, without leader, rashly and by chance; neither are kings or those who are in charge for them, thus constituted. But as once the kings of Judah, so now ours, are anointed by the command and will of God, whether they are good or bad or men or women. For there is no power but of God', Laurence Humphrey, *On the Preservation of Religion and its True Reformation* (1559), trans. J. Kemp, in Kemp J.K., *Laurence Humphrey, Elizabethan Puritan: His Life and Political Theories*, PhD thesis (West Virginia: 1978), quoted by Chavura 67.

31 Andrewes Lancelot, *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures*, ed. P. McCullough (Oxford: 2005) 106–107 (18 October 1591), spelling modernized.

Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects (1559), helped read scripture as a topical, historical document, viewing women's subjection as a social construct, rather than an absolute necessity; the point was also developed by other writers such as Bruni da Pistoia in *Difese delle Donne* (Milan, 1559).³²

Among defenders of women, however, most continued to acknowledge the *doxa* of their relative weakness, due in part to what was still perceived as a constitutive weakness and tendency to be carried away by affection, rather than reason. To counter these failings, Sir Thomas Smith advocated the use of advisors in 1583: 'such personages [such as Queens should] never lack the counsel of such grave and discrete men as be able to supply all other defects'.³³ Ironically, however, such recommendations suggest only a partial understanding of the Genesitic model: Eve, being ignorant, could be deceived by the serpent who may well be considered as woman's first advisor. Incidentally, this prompted some writers to wonder whether the serpent was gendered, some suggesting that it was female, i.e. sweet-tongued, spreading false and dangerous rumours. In a painting by Johann Brabender in Münster, *Sündenfall vom Paradies des Doms* (1550), the serpent has exposed breasts; in the mid-fifteenth-century Bracacci Chapel in Florence, the serpent is distinctly feminine.³⁴ Others insisted on the serpent's masculinity, underlining the *sexual* interpretations of Eve's temptation by the beast, even claiming that Eve gave birth to his brood, Cain and Abel, partly explaining why one of the brothers turned out a fratricide.³⁵

More generally, views such as those of Sir Thomas Smith emphasized the need to provide a decent education and a sense of history to women of the elite, and Aylmer found solace in the idea that in England any monarch's potential shortcomings could be compensated by Parliament's sound counsel.³⁶ In 1559, Queen Elizabeth seemed to be a case in point. She had Roger Ascham as her tutor, who claimed the princess was very knowledgeable in Latin, developing a beautiful style, notably in her translations, for instance of Plutarch's essay on curiosity – skills which would turn to her advantage when she ascended the throne – and her early years suggested a certain deference to Parliamentary

32 Jordan, "Woman's Rule" 438, 421–451.

33 Smith Sir Thomas, *De Republica Anglorum: A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England* [1583], eds. Alston L. – Maitland F.W. (Cambridge: 1906), quoted by Jordan, "Woman's Rule" 441.

34 Charlesworth J.H., *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (New Haven: 2010) 50.

35 Almond, *Adam and Eve* 173–175.

36 Aylmer John, *Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects* (London, John Day: 1559) sig. H2v–H3r.

procedures.³⁷ Others criticized her choice of advisors who eventually served as proxies to stamp out any criticism against the regime.

Curiosity, Gynocracy and Dynastic Change

The representation of female kingship was fraught with peril in early modern England. While Elizabethan censorship limited direct criticism of female rule and several writers sought to justify it, most pamphlets continued to link contemporary wars and chaos to the 'unnatural' nature of gynocracy, claiming such troubles descended from the Biblical curse for which Eve's curiosity was the prime culprit. The death of Elizabeth in 1603 radically changed the prevailing atmosphere. The Virgin Queen was succeeded by an experienced, mature male heir, allowing English subjects to look forward to a return to a stable, long-term, male-led monarchy, one which no longer elicited the 'curiosity of nations'.³⁸

The dynastic change was also felt in the drama of the time, as evidenced by Shakespeare's early Jacobean productions. In the first decade of James I's reign, female kingship was represented onstage in a manner which, far from extolling the virtues of female rule, suggested either their weakness or wickedness with a series of memorably dangerous queens, such as Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* (c. 1606), Regan and Goneril in *King Lear* (c. 1606), or the Queen in *Cymbeline* (c. 1609). In these plays, the dramatist depicts the evil queens' malice using the *topos* of women as 'leaking vessels', actually materializing their malevolence with liquids: poison in *Cymbeline* (1.6 *et al.*), the unending effort to washing off blood in *Macbeth* (5.1), and a combination of the two motifs in *King Lear*, as Goneril stabs herself after having poisoned her sister Regan (5.3). These common *modi operandi* are in keeping with a Genesitic reading of

37 Levin C., "We princes, I tell you, are set on stages": Elizabeth I and Dramatic Self-Representation", in Cerasano S.P. – Wynne-Davies M. (eds.), *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594–1998* (New York: 1998) 121. Similarly, women could be patrons of the arts. 'Mary Wroth, Lucy Russell (the Countess of Bedford), Mary Herbert (the Countess of Pembroke), Elizabeth Cary, and Dorothy Shirley are but a few of the well-known examples of Renaissance women who were responsible for creating "a significant index of the importance of women for the drama"'. Choudhury M., "Review of: *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* by Theodora Jankowski", *The Drama Review* 38, 2 (1994) 188.

38 Shakespeare William, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes, Arden Shakespeare (London: 1997) 5.2.4. The line is spoken by Edmund, the Duke of Gloucester's bastard son, as he complains about the consequences of his illegitimate birth.

women's nature which claimed that women had achieved their aims serpent-like, by indirect means, convincing or coaxing men to perform treasonous acts, or furnishing them with equally devious, or 'curious', means to do away with (male or female) rivals.

These plays seemingly presented female rule as a monstrous 'curiosity'. In doing so, and in line with the works of Knox or Goodman on the right to rebel against tyranny, they also subtly contributed to questioning the prevailing system of government, which might have potentially paved the ground for the later demise of the monarchy and the Civil War. This critical perspective on history was further questioned by the spectacular increase in the number of women 'prophets' and 'curious' women in the decades preceding the Civil War – two phenomena challenging the hitherto male-dominated fields of religious prophecy and scientific research. Despite a return to patriarchy and gender orthodoxy with the advent of the Stuart monarchy, the *gynocratic* curiosity of sixteenth-century English history may thus have paved the way to the development of women's *epistemological* curiosity in the seventeenth century.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Aylmer John, *An harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiectes agaynst the late blowne blaste, concerninge the gouernme[n]t of vvemen. wherin be confuted all such reasons as a straunger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to obedience* (London, John Day: 1559).
- Andrewes Lancelot, *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures*, ed. P. McCullough (Oxford: 2005).
- Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. E. Hill, O.P., ed. J.E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: 2002).
- Burton Richard, *The Anatomy of Melancholy: What it Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Seuerall Cures of it* (London, Henry Cripps: 1638).
- Calvin John, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [1577], trans. A. Golding (Edinburgh: 1973).
- Goodman Christopher, *How superior powers ought to be obeyd of their subiects and wherin they may lawfully by Gods Worde be disobeyed and resisted. Wherin also is declared the cause of all this present miserie in England, and the onely way to remedy the same* (Geneva, John Crispin: 1558).
- Holland Henry, *The Historie of Adam, or the foure-fold state of man, vvell formed in his creation, deformed in his corruption, reformed in Grace, and perfected in glory* (London, T[homas] E[ast] for Thomas Man: 1606).

- Knox John, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women* (Geneva, [J. Poullain and A. Rebul]: 1558).
- Shakespeare William, *King Lear*, ed. Foakes R.A., Arden Shakespeare (London: 1997).
- Smith Sir Thomas, *De Republica Anglorum: A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England* [1583], eds. L. Alston – F.W. Maitland (Cambridge: 1906).
- Willet Andrew, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum: that is, a sixfold commentary upon the two first bookes of Moses, being Genesis and Exodus Wherein these translations are compared together* (London, John Haviland: 1633).

Secondary Sources

- Almond P.C., *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: 2008).
- Caney A., “Let He Who Objects Produce Sound Evidence: Lord Henry Howard and the Sixteenth Century Gynecocracy Debate”, *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations* 97 (2004).
- Capodivacca A., *Curiosity and the Trials of the Imagination in Early Modern Italy*, PhD thesis (Berkeley: 2007).
- Charlesworth J.H., *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (New Haven: 2010).
- Chavura S.A., *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden – Boston: 2011).
- Choudhury M., “Review of: *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* by Theodora Jankowski”, *The Drama Review* 38, 2 (1994) 186–189.
- Dubois-Nayt A., “La tyrannie travestie, ou le genre au service du tyrannicide” *Cercles* 16, 2 (2006) 33–43.
- , “‘La différence des sexes’: construction et fonction du ‘genre’ dans la pensée politique de John Knox”, *Cités* 34, 2 (2008) 157–169.
- Felch S.M., “The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, 4 (1995) 805–822.
- , “‘Deir Sister’: The Letters of John Knox to Anne Vaughan Lok”, *Renaissance and Reformation* 19, 4 (1995) 47–68.
- Jankowski T.A., *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana: 1992).
- Jansen S.L., *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: 2002).
- Jordan C., “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, 3 (1987) 421–451.
- Kemp J.K., *Laurence Humphrey, Elizabethan Puritan: His Life and Political Theories*, PhD thesis (West Virginia: 1978).
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).
- Levin C., “‘We princes, I tell you, are set on stages’: Elizabeth I and Dramatic Self-Representation”, in Cerasano S.P. – Wynne-Davies M. (eds.), *Readings in Renaissance*

- Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594–1998* (New York: 1998) 113–124.
- Levin C. – Carney J.E. – Barrett-Graves D. (eds.), *'High and Mighty Queens' of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations, The New Middle Ages* (New York: 2003).
- Levin C. – Sullivan P.A. (eds.), *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women* (Albany: 1995).
- Mattox M.L., "Luther on Eve, Women, and the Church", in Wengert T.J. (ed.), *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids – Cambridge: 2009) 251–270.
- Pettegree A., *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies* (Aldershot: 1996).
- Shephard A., *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: the Knox debate* (Keele: 1994).
- Thompson J.L., *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries* (Geneva: 1992).
- Wanegffelen T., *Le Pouvoir contesté: souveraines d'Europe à la Renaissance* (Paris: 2008).

Curious Men and Women in the Tudor Controversy about Women

Armel Dubois-Nayt

By the sixteenth century, the continental *Querelle des femmes* had spread to England where it flourished in print. It is usually thought that the female controversy started in France with Christine de Pizan, who reclaimed women's moral and intellectual abilities in her *Cité des dames*, and it also seems to have been the case in England, where her seminal work was translated by Brian Anslay and printed for the first time in 1521.¹ Pizan's learned book about women was later followed by two other humanist defences: an original dialogue by Sir Thomas Elyot (*Defence of Good Women*, 1540) and a translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim's Latin treaty *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexus* (1529) by David Clapham (*A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde*, 1542). But the debate quickly became more popular in the form of series of pamphlets that railed against the defects of the feminine sex or mocked the motives of its detractors. In the Tudor period, which will be the focus of this essay, at least eighteen texts contributed to the debate about the status and nature of women between 1540 and 1599. The figure doubles if we take into consideration the hundred years between 1540 and 1640.² It is therefore almost stating the obvious to say that womankind became an object of curiosity with the advent of humanism in England. As a consequence, the works that discussed their supposed worth/deficiency also became curios that could be collected and compiled. Examples of such compilations still exist today, for example a manuscript preserved at Magdalene College in Cambridge which contains twenty-one satires collected by Sir Richard Maitland between 1570 and 1585.³

Not all misogynist satires can be associated with the *Querelle*, though, and this is why Sir Richard Maitland's collection extends beyond the controversy of the period 1540–1599 which is the object of the present essay. For a text to qualify as belonging to the *Querelle*, it must either answer an earlier text or

1 Anslay Brian, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes* (London, H. Pepwell: 1521).

2 Benson P.J., *Texts from the Querelle, 1521–1615* (Aldershot: 2008) IX.

3 Capern A., *The Historical Study of Women. England 1500–1700* (Basingstoke: 2010) 33.

be answered by a later one. It can also stage a dialogue between a misogynist and a philogynist. In any case, it must be part of an exchange of views at the initiative of or in response to its author. What matters is that whether in the texts themselves, or in their sequels or prequels, both the case for and the case against women are expanded. This dialectic of attack on and defence of women explains the appearance of these texts in clusters, as Pamela Joseph Benson has pointed out. In the Tudor period, five interrelated texts were published between 1540 and 1542,⁴ five again between 1557 and 1561,⁵ three between 1567 and 1572,⁶ and five again between 1589 and 1599.⁷

Based on this corpus of texts (with the exception of the two that are now lost),⁸ this essay will first try to clarify the reasons for this heightened interest in the nature and status of womankind. Why indeed did the topic of woman become so popular? Do the arguments in the pamphlets inform us about the nature of the curiosity of their authors? What transpires of their curiosity? Was it genuine or simulated? How did the opposite side of the debate react to the curiosity of the author who initiated the controversy? Finally, did these texts intend to create a new body of knowledge about women?

In a second section, this essay will turn to the *topoi* of female curiosity to examine whether curiosity was used predominantly on one side of the debate or the other. I will then focus on the rhetorical exploitation of the multifaceted notion of 'curiosity', which, in the early modern period covered a whole spectrum of meaning from 'care or diligence' to over-inquisitiveness, and even carnal curiosity. To do so, I will study one of the practices that manifested the social eagerness to discover what lay behind appearances, gossip, which,

4 Elyot Sir Thomas, *The Defence of Good Women* (1540); Gosynhyll Edward, *The Scholehouse of Women*; I.D., *Muliereum Pean*; Vaughan Robert, *A Dyalogue defensive for Women*; Clapham Edward, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of woman kynde* (1542).

5 More Edward, *Lytle and Bryefe Tretyse called the Defence of Women* (1560); Gosynhyll Edward, *The Prayse of all Women called Mulierum Pean* (?1557); I.D., *Here begynneth a lytle boke named the Schole house of women: wherein every man may rede a goodly prayse of the condicions of women* (1560); *The Deceyte of Women to the Instruction and Ensample of all Men* (?1557).

6 *A Letter sent by the Maydens of London* (1567); *The Merry meeting of Maidens in London* (1567 now lost); Pyrrye Charles, *The Praise and Dispraise of Women* (1569).

7 Anger Jane, *Jane Anger her Protection for Women* (1589); *Boke his Surfeyt in Love, with a farewel to the folies of his own phantasie* (1588 now lost); Nashe Thomas, *The Anatomie of Absurditie, Contayning a breefe confutation of the slender imputed prayeses to feminine perfection* (1589); Gosson Stephen, *Quips for Upstart, Newfangled Gentlewomen* (1595); Breton Nicolas, *The Wil of Wit* (The Praise of virtuous Ladies 1597); Gibson Anthony, *A Woman's Worth, defended against all the men in the world* (1599).

8 See notes 6 and 7.

according to Barbara Benedict, can be seen as 'an unregulated exchange of an unverified information that commodifies others'.⁹

Specialists of the controversy have put forward several explanations to account for this peak of interest in the nature of womankind. The first argument they invoke is that the invention of printing boosted misogynistic literature for commercial reasons, because it sold well. Hence Suzanne Hull's comment that printing 'was a boon to mankind. To womankind it was a boon and a bane'.¹⁰ The claim is supported by Joad Raymond's research in which he shows that the texts of the *Querelle* had some extended currency in the sixteenth century and that their topic, as well as their affordable price, appealed to an increasingly heterogeneous readership.¹¹ This is reflected in the pamphlets themselves, for instance in the accusation of the six maid servants who supposedly answer the author of *The Merry meeting of Maidens in London* and complain about the fact that he was 'procured by povertie to make any thing merily for money'.¹² Three stationers (William Copland, Abraham Veale and John Kyng) even seem to have specialized in printing texts in this genre. One can therefore wonder whether they created the demand for such literature or whether they simply tried to cater for a pre-existing demand. In either case, however, the economic argument is not strictly-speaking an explanation for this increased interest in the literature for and against women. It is a symptom of the disease, not the disease itself. At best it helps us quantify, not qualify, the evidence suggesting such a demand, extending consideration of why authors chose to write about women to the issue of why readers wanted to read about them.

This is why some psychological and social explanations have also been suggested. The broadest in scope has been advanced by Carroll Camden's work, *The Elizabethan Woman*, in which she contends that womankind was a closed book for men, and that this stimulated literature in general and misogynistic/philogynistic literature in particular.¹³ In the manner of John Donne who compared women to the sun and wrote that they had a motion of their own which their

9 Benedict B.M., *Curiosity. A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago – London: 1992) 2.

10 Hull S.W., *Women According to Men. The World of Tudor Stuart Women* (Walnut Creek – London – New Delhi: 1996) 16.

11 Raymond J., *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: 2003) 280.

12 Anon., *A letter Sent by the Maydens of London, to the Vertuous Matrones & Mistresses of the Same, in the Defense of their Lawfull Libertie* (London, Henry Binneman for Thomas Hacket: 1567) sig. Aviii^r.

13 Camden C., *The Elizabethan Woman – Revised edition* (Mamaroneck: 1975) 35.

husbands could not fathom, male writers were therefore purportedly inclined to write about women in an attempt to pierce the female enigma.

Less convincing, however, is the claim that at the time books were not issued about men because 'everyone knew about them – what they were capable of doing, what they were supposed to do, and what they did, indeed the whole world was run by men'.¹⁴ Given the new possibilities offered to both men and women, both inside and outside the Church, at the time of humanism and the Reformation, this might seem like an odd comment. Besides, it is difficult to imagine how one could write about women and not also write about men, although apparently men were more in need of reading about women than the other way round. Nicholas Breton for instance built his defence in the *Will of Will* on a lengthy comparison between women and men to demonstrate their equality.¹⁵ On the other hand, it is very likely that the audience for such material at the time was male-dominated, with the calculation that only 10% of women were literate in the sixteenth century against 20% of adult males.¹⁶

In addition it is undeniable that the male writers' lack of curiosity about their own kind, the male sex, also became a standard argument in the defences. It is for instance used by Jane Anger, the first Englishwoman to take part in the controversy, who writes: 'I would that ancient writers would as well have busied their heads about deciphering the deceits of their own sex as they have about setting down our follies; and I would some would call in question that now which hath ever been questionless'.¹⁷ The argument is found again under the pen of Nicholas Breton, who believes that if man looks into himself, 'hee shall see so great a part of a woman'.¹⁸

Other early modern works also support the claim made by historians such as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford that at the time, and more acutely than at other times, woman was 'in herself' considered problematic.¹⁹ It is the case for instance of Acidalius's *New Disputation against Women* (1595), which raises the question again of whether women are human and have souls.²⁰ In this context, the allusion of the anonymous author of *The Praise and Dispraise of*

14 Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* 35.

15 Breton Nicholas, *The Praise of Vertuous Ladies* in *The Will of Will* (London, Thomas Creede: 1599) sig. Bvvi^r.

16 Laurence A., *Women in England 1500–1760. A Social History* (London: 1994) 166.

17 Anger Jane, *Her Protection for Women*, in Shepherd S. (ed.), *The Women's Sharp Revenge. Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (London: 1985) 38. See also 36.

18 Breton, *The Praise of Vertuous Ladies* sig. Bbri^r. See also sig. Bbb2^r.

19 Mendelson S. – Crawford P., *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 1998) 19.

20 Hart C. (ed.), *Disputatio nova contra mulieres. A New Argument Against Women: a Critical Translation from the Latin with Commentary, together with the Original Latin Text of 1595* (Lewiston: 1998).

*Women*²¹ to Plato's uncertainty about whether he should place woman among the reasoning creatures or among the beasts takes on a deeper meaning, and requires us to reassess the purport of men's investigation about women at the time. Such an investigation not only aimed at entertaining readers, but was also intended to convey knowledge and to shape the reader's understanding about serious issues. This is something we can easily lose sight of as a result of the repetitive nature of these texts. They are often conventional and repeat the same examples, anecdotes, themes, tropes and figures, but this has more to do with 'the plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken character'²² of knowledge in the sixteenth century, as Michel Foucault put it, than with a lack of genuine curiosity for women.

This heightened interest in women has also been attributed to the latter's changing status, which culminated in the succession of several women to the throne in both England and Scotland in the middle of the century. Caroll Camden has linked the controversy to women's new position in society and their 'crowding in the economic and intellectual spheres', concluding that in this new context: 'it is no wonder, then, that men were questioning the true nature of this somewhat new woman of the Renaissance'.²³

A decade before women actually reached positions of supreme power in England through the Tudor line of female succession, women defenders could conversely argue that the avid curiosity in the female sex and the eagerness to slander them could be accounted for by men's innate supremacy. This is the view voiced by the magpie in a dialogue between two birds entitled *A Dyalogue Defensyve for Women* and published in 1542:

The lowest parte of the hedge is troden downe
Under fore sayde the Pye, whan the hyst is forborne
Womans power is small, in felde and in towne
Therefore I them sclander, therefore I them skorne
Men rule and governe, by see and by lande,
promocyons and profytes, by them I may have
Therefore to catche somewhat, in to my hande
I laude them, I flatter them.²⁴

21 Anon., *The Praise and Dispraise of Women: gathered out of Sundrye Authors, by John Allday* (London, For William Ponsorby: 1579).

22 Foucault M., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. unnamed (London: 1970) 30.

23 Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* 35.

24 Vaughan Robert, *A Dialogue Defensyve for Women against Malycyous Detractoures* (London, Robert Wyer for Rychards Banckes: 1542) sig. Eii^r.

Other social phenomena have been envisaged as possible incentives for this interest in the nature of woman. Two of these are linked to marriage, which is in itself a secondary topic of the controversy. Joan Kelly thus explains the popularity of the controversy through a re-evaluation of marital life in the wake of the Reformation.²⁵ This may have meant that medieval misogyny, which Katherine Rogers considers as based on the guilt of sex and the fear of female seduction,²⁶ waned as celibacy, along with virginity, was downgraded below the level of marriage and its healthy sex life combining mutual pleasure and moderation. But in fact it is quite the opposite that seems to have been true. The cards may have been reshuffled by the renewed debate on marital life, but the odds were still very much in men's favour since, on the marriage market itself, women were at a disadvantage because they outnumbered men, particularly in cities and in the upper classes.²⁷

This sense of all-powerfulness on the marriage market is not, however, what contemporary 'feminists' saw in their opponents, whom they recurrently described as speaking as from spite after a rejection. To cite just one obvious example, we can turn to Candidus, the champion of women in Thomas Elyot's Platonic dialogue, who accuses his opponent Caninius of speaking against women out of spurned love.²⁸

Along with this fear of rejection comes that of betrayal, a theme which clearly emerges from the writings of the misogynists themselves. This disquietude is of particular interest, as it seems directly linked to the dynamic of the curious mind and its undue desire to know everything. In several works by women haters, it seems in fact to trigger the impetus for writing. The curious in this context becomes the one who is afraid of losing sight of what is happening around him. His obsessive curiosity is the mirror image and the flip side of his anxiety at being deceived. Two texts, *The Deceyte of Women* and *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled*, are entirely built on that fixation, although they deal with different subject matters.²⁹ The first tract is a collection of tales that tries to exploit all the *exempla* that illustrate women's tricks to deceive men. The second one is an attack on the mores of the time and particularly on

25 Kelly J., "Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes", in J. Kelly (ed.) *Women, History & Theory* (Chicago – London: 1984) 73.

26 Rogers K., *The Troublesome Helpmate. A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: 1966) 11.

27 Hull, *Women According to Men* 18.

28 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Av^r.

29 Anon., *The Deceyte of Women to the Instruction and Ensample of all Men Yonge and Olde Newly Corrected* (London, by [W. Copland for] Abraham Vele: 1557?); Gosson Stephen, *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen* (London, Richard Johnes: 1596).

women's fashion. In both cases, the authorial *personae* express their frustration at not being able to see women as they really are, either because they have disguised their true nature or because they have covered up their betrayals with false tales. In Gosson, male anxiety crystallizes around the new fangles and ornaments, which are all, in actual fact, props that can be used to hide one's true face: make up, 'maskes', 'fannes', 'baudie buskes', 'long privie coates', 'hoopes'. Other objects symbolise male anxiety in *The Deceyte of Women*. There is, for instance, the trunk (*male*) in which one French woman has locked her husband so she can spend the night with her lover, or, even more explicitly, the glass lamp made by Virgilius, 'the which shone & lighted all Rome over and over', and which ends up being broken by a woman so that she and her friends can dally as they wish and with whomsoever they wish.³⁰

On the basis of these two pamphlets, one can contend that men's curiosity for the female sex in general, and for their wives' doings in particular, was also aroused in men by the moral obligation they felt to keep sexual control over their household. The patriarchal society pressurized women into being silent and obedient, seen but not heard, but it can be argued that it put a heavy burden on men too, and made them vulnerable. By setting hegemonic masculinity as the required standard of manhood and equating it with sexual honour for every rank of society, it generated a moral duty of coercion in men. Such a constraint is enough to explain the paranoid repetitiveness of their discourse and to suspect some form of genuine, underlying anguish. In *The Deceyte of Women*, for example, one of the concluding tales suggests this line of interpretation. It tells the story of a learned Italian man who dedicates his life to the study of antifeminist literature so that 'he could take good heed, and to be wel ware that he wolde not be deceived with such deceyte'. But his 'fayre yong' wife outsmarts him and devises a plot of her own to trap him. The jealous husband is clever enough to read through it but not to prevent it, which kills him, 'for because that he had studied so longe in vayne'.³¹ Hegemonic masculinity bridled early modern women, but it also coerced men into an existence where the key to social happiness and peace of mind was the ability to obtain and maintain 'exclusive heterosexual marital relationships'.³²

In this context, Gosynhyll's attack on women is also an attempt at taking back control of the household and protecting male honour. It focuses on female gossips and female friendship because in a society that confines manhood

30 Anon., *The Deceyte of Women* sig. Jiii^r.

31 Anon., *The Deceyte of Women* sig. Ki^r.

32 Foyster E.A., *Manhood in Early Modern England. Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London – New York: 1999) 4.

to sexual reputation, gossips are the real challengers to male hegemony. As Elizabeth A. Foyster has established, they 'have power over men, first, because as wives they have gained access to the most personal knowledge of their husband's bodies and minds, information which they can choose to "betray" to others. Secondly, by their criticism they appear to control the way that men behave'.³³ If, in this tract, Gosynhyll's misogynist *persona* pries into the school-house of women, it is because such a female stronghold could bring down the little commonwealths on which married men were supposed to rule at home. His own curiosity is therefore entirely motivated by his longing to meet early modern society's expectations about what his role should be about.

The examples discussed so far tend to suggest that the source of curiosity underlying the *Querelle* largely rests with male writers. Men were supposedly curious about the other half of humanity as a result of a mixture of feelings of confusion, resentment at the prospect of fading prerogatives, a sense of all-powerfulness on the marriage market, and a fear of rejection or disrepute. But the Renaissance ambivalent view of women's nature, which was mostly inherited from ancient writers and the Scriptures also kept the debate alive.

In most philosophical and theological systems the very notion of woman was in fact dual. Platonism is a good case in point as is proved by the texts of the debate. Elyot uses Plato against Aristotle, for example, but the anonymous author of *The Praise and Dispraise of Women* appealed to Plato to support his misogynistic stance.³⁴ As Susan Moller Okin writes: 'Plato's ideas on the subject of women appear at first to present an unresolvable enigma', for on the one hand the philosopher asserted 'that the female sex was created from the souls of the most wicked and irrational men', but on the other hand he made 'a far more radical proposal for the equal education and social role of the two sexes than was to be made by a major philosopher for more than two thousand years'.³⁵ The teachings of the Bible also account for early modern men's perplexity at women. As Constance Jordan explains, basing herself on the Scriptures, woman indeed was seen as a *persona mixta* from the start.³⁶ The two contradictory narratives of her creation condemned her to a double status: On the one hand, she was supposed to be subordinate to man as God had made her his helper but, on the other, she could be considered as his equal for she was like man, created in the image of God.

33 Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England* 60.

34 Alday, *The Praise and Dispraise of Women* sig. 63^v.

35 Okin S.M., *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: 1992) 15.

36 Jordan C., *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: 1990) 22–23.

This double assessment of womankind condemned her to being Janus-faced, a notion that fitted perfectly the dialectic of the *Querelle*, since it facilitated both attack and defence. But to some, it also made the possibility of reaching a definite conclusion very unlikely. The anonymous translation of Guillaume Alexis's *Le débat de l'homme et de la femme* leaves the reader to decide who won the debate.³⁷ Amanda Capern sees in this absence of closure evidence of the barrenness of the debate, which, so it seems, could not create new knowledge and merely consisted of a dialogue of the deaf.³⁸ The longevity of the controversy itself and the possibility for writers to write on both sides of the quarrel are further arguments in support of the inconclusiveness of their arguments. But here again, it is more the nature of knowledge at the time that is in question than the object of that knowledge. Those participating in the debate could only use the tools that were at their disposal and a form of knowledge that Foucault has characterised as 'a thing of sand'.³⁹ But this knowledge could be reorganized and this is what early feminists did, as Joan Kelly suggested. They primarily rewrote history to reshape knowledge from their standpoint. If they did not go any further according to her, it is because of their isolation and their lack of support from society at large.⁴⁰

Not all writers, however, doubted that a definite conclusion could be reached. Some protofeminists clearly believed that they were refashioning knowledge about women and debunking the pseudo science of their opponents. Thomas Elyot is one of those and his debate ends with the admission of the misogynist character, Caninius, that he has changed his mind.⁴¹ Elyot also reasserts his belief in the meaningfulness of the confrontation of ideas at the beginning of the dialogue when he makes it clear that none of the contenders of the dialogue belongs to the sceptics.⁴² In his opinion, the debate was only worth having if it involved two opponents with clear and strong viewpoints and if one could overcome the other.

Conversely, misogynists such as Thomas Nashe did not feel that they were writing in vain either, and were eager to debunk the 'trifling' defences of the female sex written, they asserted, as attempts to win love but not to acquire

37 He [*sic*] *begynneth an interlocucion, with an argument, betwyxt man and woman & whiche of them could proue to be most excelle[n]t* (London, W. de Worde: 1525?) sig. Ai^r.

38 Capern, *The Historical Study of Women* 36.

39 Foucault, *The Order of Things* 29.

40 Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes" 75.

41 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Dvi^v–vii^r.

42 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Aiii^r.

knowledge.⁴³ In the *Anatomie of Absurditie*, for example, Nashe berates 'the restorers of womankind' for being ignorant.⁴⁴ Contrary to them, he proposes to carry out an 'investigation', a scientific dissection of the champions' discourse and to expose into their absurd logic with accuracy and exactness.⁴⁵

In both the case of the attacker and that of the defender, the point of taking up the pen was to put things right; but whose curiosity was answered as a result? In most cases we can assume it was male curiosity, since the debate was mainly between men and about women.

Things took a different turn when a woman entered the controversy and made it quite clear that she had little interest in satisfying male interest in women. Jane Anger appears in fact determined to keep her answer to the misogynists circumscribed to a symbolic gynaecium whose door she keeps tightly locked: 'Let us secretly, ourselves with ourselves, consider how and in what they that are our worst enemies are both inferior unto us and most beholden unto our kindness'.⁴⁶ This is clearly a provocative gesture aimed at titillating the paranoid curiosity men had expressed in their attacks; but by promoting the idea of such a schoolhouse for women, Jane Anger is also offering women the opportunity to enhance their own curiosity about gender differences: 'I have set down unto you which are of mine own sex the subtle dealings of untrue-meaning men: not that you should condemn all men, but to the end that you may take heed of the false hearts of all and still reprove the flattery which remains in all'.⁴⁷ Jane Anger was clearly being provocative here in confronting men's paranoid fear of female gossiping in secret, and reshaping it as legitimate curiosity. But in the early modern period, the word 'curiosity' held a wide range of meanings; if we want to fully comprehend how the female controversy in these texts hinged upon the concept of 'curiosity', we need to extend our understanding of the term's semantic flexibility at the time.

According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, when the term 'curious' was applied to a person it could mean 'careful', 'meticulous', 'fastidious', but it could also convey the secondary meaning of 'skilful', 'ingenious', 'expert' or 'learned', or perhaps 'solicitous', 'concerned about something', and even 'zealous, eager

43 Nashe Thomas, *The Anatomie of Absurditie: Contayning a Breefe Confutation of the Slender Imputed Praises to Feminine Perfection, with a Short Description of the Severall Practises of Youth, and Sundry follies of our Licentious Times* (London, I. Charlewood for Thomas Hacket: 1589) 19.

44 Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* 19, 32.

45 Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* 7.

46 Anger, *Her Protection* 39.

47 Anger, *Her Protection* 43.

to do something'. All of these definitions suggest favourable attributes, but the term also carried the pejorative sense of describing an inquisitive or prying person. All of these meanings are sometimes represented in the debate texts under discussion here, so it is worthwhile remembering the positive connotations of the idea of curiosity when the term is applied to the dedication of women to their families and homes, or to their learning and reason. These positive connotations offer an interesting contrast to the negative connotations which the term 'curiosity' had already acquired at the time of the early Tudor and Elizabethan controversies, when it could refer to an interest for matters which do not concern one, fastidiousness as to food and clothing, but also to sexual snooping. Significantly, it is the negative connotations of the notion which originally set the terms of the controversy itself, where the idea contributed to an argument used to demonstrate women's destructiveness to the social order, despite the fact that the word 'curious' is seldom encountered in the texts considered, and that, ironically enough, when it is, it more frequently applies to men than to women.

The word is in fact most commonly found in the writings of the 'restorers of womankind'⁴⁸ to attack men. The first to do so is Thomas Elyot who twice accuses the arch-misogynist Aristotle of being vain: 'he was more curiouse in his apparaile and decking, then was convenient to his profession'.⁴⁹ In Elyot's treatise, Caninius, the misogynist character, also criticizes his opponent for being too finicky in his linguistic nuances: 'In faithe ye be to curiouse. Perdy the worde neyther made nor marred any thyng of your purpose'.⁵⁰ At the end of the century, Jane Anger deprecates another type of male curiosity: excessive fussiness: 'Their eyes are so curious as, be not all women equal with Venus for beauty, they cannot abide the sight of them'.⁵¹ Conversely, in the very few occurrences in which the term applies to women, it is both used pejoratively and appreciatively. As a compliment, it is used by Jane Anger to praise women's practical efficiency in the household: 'They love to go handsomely in their apparel and reioice in the pride thereof, yet who is the cause of it, but our carefulness to see that everything about them be curious?'⁵² As a slur, Thomas Nashe uses it to castigate women's extravagance: 'Galeria, also, that gallant dame, which scorned the golden pallace of the emperor Nero as not curious

48 Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* 19.

49 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Bvi^r-v.

50 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Ci^r.

51 Anger, *Her Protection* 36.

52 Anger, *Her Protection* 39.

inough to shroude her beauty'.⁵³ Finally, there is one occurrence of the word 'curiosity' in Elyot's text that does not apply to people. It is employed as a synonym of 'folly' or 'fantasy', and applied to 'vertue' to refer to the loss of moral ideals in early modern society: 'But vertue, who is not so commonly seene, and of so many manne looked on, is nowe of diverse men so perversely esteemed, that is of some called foly, of many men fantasy and of some curiositie'.⁵⁴

The quasi absence of the lexeme 'curious' and its derivations in the pamphlets and treatises that make up the female controversy of the early Tudor and Elizabethan periods explains why it has not been treated as a useful category of analysis for the *Querelle* until now. This is confirmed by its equally conspicuous absence in the 'Renaissance List of faults' or 'Renaissance Lists of Virtues' drawn by Linda Woodbridge, who includes 39 notions in the first inventory and 25 in the second.⁵⁵ This should not, however, dissuade us from looking at curiosity as a theme of the debate, first because several of these notions are coterminous to that of 'curiosity' or even embraced by it, and, secondly, because it is a way to build on Neil Kenny's contention that curiosity is gendered insofar as it is used differently in relation to men and to women.⁵⁶

After investigation, it seems that women's evil curiosity in the early modern female controversy is mostly threefold, with gossiping, unruly sexual appetite and unbridled lust for clothes and food as its main focal points. Gosynhyll's attack, which ignited the debate twice in the course of the sixteenth century, seems to be the best place to start our analysis of the first *topos* as it offers the most comprehensive and lively representation of this stereotype through a dialogue between an old and a young gossip.⁵⁷ Here the reader witnesses a typical case of 'an unregulated exchange of an unverified information that commodifies others'.⁵⁸ In this specific instance, the other is none other than the husband of the young gossip who is accused of abusing his wife both physically and mentally.⁵⁹

The freedom of speech granted to women by women in these unfettered female quarters, the so-called 'schole house',⁶⁰ is clearly a mark of the discontent

53 Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* 16.

54 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Aiiii^r.

55 Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance* 351 and 369.

56 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 326.

57 Gosynhyll Edward, *The Schole House*, in Utterson E.V. (ed.), *Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry: Republished Principally from Early Printed Copies in The Black Letter* (London: 1825) vol. 2. 62, v. 189–195.

58 See note 9.

59 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 62, v. 201–202 et 64, v. 234–235.

60 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 63, v. 210–216.

that characterizes curiosity.⁶¹ The two gossips openly express their disappointment at being unhappily married, and their wish for more freedom, beginning with the construction of an alternative social order, where women advise and scheme – which could lead to the overthrow of the patriarchal system, unimaginable at the time. In the attacks, the pamphleteers therefore first blame the curious gossip for her infringement on the social norm of obedient silence, but they also condemn her ability to hold grudges and to forget nothing, particularly not slights, which is an intrinsically negative component of curiosity.

More classically, women are criticized in *The Schole House* for their indiscretion, as painfully verified by Cicero who ‘escaped hard with the life’ after his wife betrayed his plot to ‘put away the emperours sonne to the ende that / [they] may reign and rule both lande and sea’.⁶² Here, the early modern *Querelle* simply adopts the ancient and medieval stereotype of the garrulousness of women, but it is more imaginative when it comes to countering the claim. Three clearly stated counter-arguments stand out. The first one, rather blunt, is used by Pyrre who merely plagiarises Gosynhyll and denies the accusation point-blank.⁶³ A more sophisticated statement is made by Agrippa who extends the humanist glorification of speech that places mankind over beasts to a demonstration of the superiority of women and a glorification of female loquaciousness.⁶⁴ Finally, the third line of refutation consists in turning the accusation against men on the ground that ‘women beare much blame, and men are more in faut’, as Edward More argues.⁶⁵ The misogynist (Caninius, the Raucous Pie...) thus becomes, in the defences, the gossip, i.e. someone who accumulates charges without proof to the point of becoming slanderous. The argument in response to this is spoken by the Falcon in *The Dialogue Defensyve* when he concludes that to slander a woman is to commit blasphemy against God.⁶⁶

The second aspect of women’s impertinent curiosity in the *Querelle* is their supposedly insatiable sexual appetite, which is probably the most heavily stressed of all misogynistic stereotypes, for it was the most threatening to

61 Benedict, *Curiosity* 3.

62 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 88, v. 896–909.

63 Pyrre, *The Praise* sig. Ci^r. See also Ci^v.

64 Agrippa von Nettesheim Heinrich Cornelius, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde, translated out of Latine into Englysshe by David Clapam* (London, Thomas Bertelet: 1542) sig. Ciii^v–Ciiii^r.

65 More Edward, *A Lytle and Bryefe Treatyse Called The Defence of Women, and Especially of Englyshe Women, Made against The Schole House of Women*, in Utterson, *Select Pieces* 106.

66 Pyrre, *The Praise* sig. Aiiii^r.

early modern men, and therefore society.⁶⁷ Carnal curiosity is, as a matter of fact, the unsteady foundation stone of marriage in Gosynhyll's attack, which describes overly sexual women corrupting men into wedlock and fatherhood.⁶⁸ In a movement of escalation typical of his invective, it then develops into the promiscuity of married women whose amorous curiosity is never satisfied and always aroused by the prospect of a new experience.⁶⁹

Three types of answers were given to those accusations. The first one consisted in drawing the opposite image of the chaste woman through *exempla* to prove, as Pyrrye explains, that lechery is loathsome to the female sex in deed or thought.⁷⁰ This was neither original nor conclusive, as the debate could then shift to discussing the rhetorical value of *exempla per se*, whose weakness as inductive arguments lies in their dual use both to prove and to refute. The reasoning of pamphleteers here as in other controversies could then be that the *exempla* were badly picked, or false, and that counter-*exempla* could be found. More inventive again are the options taken by Jane Anger and Cornelius Agrippa. Jane Anger took further than other defenders⁷¹ of women the tit-for-tat strategy which consisted in displacing the charge on men, and she offensively condemned men's primal sexual urge and need for multiple partners.⁷² As for Agrippa, he also succinctly decries the double standard of sexual morality, concluding paradoxically not with the equality of the sexes but with the superiority of women.⁷³

The supposed adjunct to sexual appetite is female curiosity for clothes, adornments, cosmetics and perfumes. This is presented on the one hand as a symptom of that disorderly female need to accumulate and on the other hand as a strategy to entice men, as contended by the Pie.⁷⁴ This compulsive yearning is contemptuously sketched by Gosynhyll who extends it to gluttony.⁷⁵ But what did women's champions answer to the claim that the vanity and gluttony of the female sex threatened the household both morally and financially, as is

67 Henderson K.U. and McManus B.F., *Half Humankind. Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640* (Urbana – Chicago: 1985) 47.

68 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 68, v. 360.

69 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 77, v. 609–615.

70 Pyrrye, *The Praise* sig. Bvi^r.

71 Gosynhyll Edward, *The Praise of All Women, Called Mulierum Pean Very Fruytful and Delectable Unto all the Reders* (London, W. Myddylton: 1542?), sig. Aiii^v–Aiiii^r; More, *The Defence of Women* 131.

72 Anger, *Her Protection* 34 and 42.

73 Agrippa, *Of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde* sig. Dv^v–Dvi^r.

74 Vaughan, *A Dialogue Defensyve* sig. Ciii^v.

75 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 68, v. 350–351 and 354–356.

suggested by the Pie?⁷⁶ The easiest counterstrokes were, once more, straightforward denial as in Pyrrye,⁷⁷ and retaliation in kind, as illustrated again by Jane Anger, who turns men's insatiable desires into marital abuse.⁷⁸ But the most common form of redress was to contradict the attacker in an oblique fashion by opposing two versions of curiosity and praising women for their positive one.

As a result, the image of the vain ostentatious wife is challenged by that of the thrifty devoted household manager, the 'curious' wife in the first meaning of the term. All defenders stress the dedication of women to men from infancy to old age, their role as nurturing mothers or caring helpers and the efficiency and practical acumen that they display for the benefit of their family, community and even of the human race at large. Gosynhyll's defence is a panegyric to motherhood just as is Edward More's treatise, which realistically depicts the wakeful nights of child nursing and women's marvellous 'overthrouges in labour'.⁷⁹ Not only do these texts deny accusations of idleness levelled against women in the attacks, but they exalt their care, which is both a way of rejecting the idea that they are supported by men financially and of empowering them in a protofeminist way: 'with earnest labor and great payne, / her living she doth get: / the foode that doth her life sustaine, / is gotten by her swet'.⁸⁰ The defences, which, in most cases, come after the attacks as previously mentioned, then turn naturally to the ingratitude of husbands who reward their wives with reproaches. Some female advocates use this argument with relative decorum, but there is no restraint left when it comes to Jane Anger who dramatically portrays the caring wife as a domestic martyr who lives to absorb men's sufferings.⁸¹ In a clever jest, she ironizes about men in a brief *Querelle des hommes* where after comparing them to 'dogs in a litter', she inverts Plato's misogynistic question about the place of women in the order of beings by substituting men for women.⁸²

To conclude on this first instance of positive curiosity, there is therefore a consensual praise (in the tracts) of the meticulousness, skilfulness, and solicitousness of women; as Benson has noted, however,⁸³ this fails to open out

76 Vaughan, *A Dialogue Defensyve* sig. Cii^r.

77 Pyrrye, *The Praise* sig. Ci^v.

78 Anger, *Her Protection* 36.

79 More, *The Defence of Women* 109.

80 Pyrrye, *The Praise* sig. C.i^r.

81 Anger, *Her Protection* 35.

82 Anger, *Her Protection* 36.

83 Benson P.J., *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park: 1992) 221.

in the popular pamphlets into a defence of woman's intelligence or intellectual curiosity. Pyrrye for instance states that the woman runs the house because 'she is of quicker wit',⁸⁴ but the curious woman in that literature is just a caring woman, not one with a curious brain and potential.

It is true that the defences contain galleries of famous women that have contributed to the progress of mankind with the 'many artes and necessarie occupacions' they have invented.⁸⁵ In *A Dyalogue defensive for Women* by Robert Vaughan, the Falcon draws a brief catalogue of learned women from Carmenta to Diotima and to the Sybils. Pyrrye prolongs the list of women with learning and wisdom in his *Praise*: ten Sibyls, the Queen of Sheba, Pythagoras' daughter Dana, the poet Corinna, the wife of Scipio Africanus, Cornelia, Lady Margaret Vallois, the Queen of Navarre. But these 'curious' women, insofar as they were outstanding, cannot really be considered as curious in the sense of being intellectually inquisitive. To 'invent', which comes from the Latin 'invenire', means 'to come upon', 'to discover', and it has a passive undertone that gives it the propriety that curiosity, as a morally wrong desire, lacked in the sixteenth century. In the debate on female knowledge, which is a topic of the Tudor and Elizabethan female controversy, like the marriage debate, 'curiosity' is therefore not an entirely operative notion: women are described as capable of acquiring pre-existing knowledge, but not as capable of breaking new ground or making discoveries. In this respect, they seem to be stuck here at the receiving end.⁸⁶

Besides, if the humanist defences argue for the equality of women with men in the realm of reason, intellectual empowerment for women always finds its source in men, and by the grace of God. God gave women the gift of reason but this had to be re-enacted through a man's agency. Knowledge could not possibly be the result of female initiative. Even the usually outspoken Jane Anger does not challenge that stance and hides behind the protection of 'the weakness of [her] wits and [her] honest bashfulness'.⁸⁷

Yet the attacks fail to target the attempt made by women to get access to forbidden knowledge. Tudor and Elizabethan pamphlets make in fact little use of the female names 'that circulated in the early modern discourse as shorthands for exemplary plots of calamitous curiosity'.⁸⁸ The *Schole House* for

84 Pyrrye, *The Praise* sig. B.vi^v.

85 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Cvi^r.

86 Vaughan, *A Dialogue Defensyve* sig. B. ii^r.

87 Anger, *Her Protection* 33.

88 Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 395–396.

instance only mentions Eve and Lot's wife and does not actually point to their 'curiosity' but their 'wilfulness'.⁸⁹

It is a fact that female curiosity is not a single defect but a nexus of defects, as Neil Kenny explains, but 'wilfulness' first emphasizes women's obstinate disobedience, their rebellion against the opposite sex and God, not a desire for intellectual awakening. This confirms that the notion of intellectual curiosity was still, to some extent, foreign to the participants in the debate who, like most of their contemporaries, viewed the ability to reason as a prerequisite for education, but education as a way to tame the mind and prevent its wandering curiosity. In the case of women, education had strictly practical ends: those of turning them into good mothers and obedient wives. This was also one of the objectives of the pamphlets, which, through images of good and bad women, caring and prying ones, constituted prescriptive literature geared towards the female sex.

To conclude, we can say that the early modern female controversy follows in the literary tradition that 'monsterizes women, incarnating their curious appetite as curious objects'.⁹⁰ It uses 'the monsters of the sex' to warn the ordinary majority against the dangers of malevolent curiosity and conversely, the 'diamonds' to pay tribute to female benevolent curiosity.⁹¹ But in a perpetual movement of rebound, inherent to the interminable circularity of the Renaissance dialogue, it also repeats time and again the theme of the exception to the rules it was laying down.

Thus the argument of the 'marvaylous thinge' either good or evil, can also be used as counter-argument. Misogynists use the quantitative argument ('What thing in earth is found more rare, / then is a cole blacke swan, / whom auncient writers doe compare, / unto a good woman'⁹²), and philogynists the qualitative one: 'And if ye wolde saye, that there hath ben and is a much greater number of them that are ill, and full of unfaithfulnesse, yet if that wer true, than must ye consider, that in al kindes of thinges, are commonly found more warse than better, or elles shoulde good thinges lacke theyr estimation'.⁹³

As evident from some of the passages quoted in this essay, the controversy also offered some very obscene passages, where women are for instance described as offering 'they brestes [...] as a boucher doth his flesshe',⁹⁴ or

89 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 82, v. 742–755.

90 Benedict, *Curiosity* 125.

91 The diamond metaphor is used by Thomas Elyot in *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Biii^r–v.

92 Pyrrye, *The Dispraise* sig. Biii^v.

93 Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* sig. Bii^v–f.Biii^r.

94 Vaughan, *The Daylogue Defensyve* sig. Ciii^v.

kissing 'with open mouthe, and rowlinge eyes/ Tung to tung, disclos[ing] theis'.⁹⁵ These descriptions justify the use of the word 'curious' in the sense of pornographic, to characterize the pamphlets themselves. There is no doubt that in this respect the pamphlets cannot be considered as aimed only at women. They were designed to appeal to men and their erotic interests. Curiosity as a focus in the controversy cannot, therefore, be considered as limited to one sex. It proceeds from male curiosity as suggested in the first part of this essay, and tries to satisfy it by offering a key to the unknown other, but also condemns it.

As a result of its dialogic nature, it does not present curiosity as an entirely female problem and clearly implies that men are also guilty of the same bad curiosity. Some of the defences, such as *A letter Sent by the Maidens* intended in fact to discourage men from trying to usurp knowledge that no one but God should possess: 'And fore our thoughtes, sifthey are so prieve, that were he as cunning as the Divell, yet coulde he not knowe them, sithe God alone hathe that priveledge of all others, to know the thoughts of men, wemen, children, and of every living creature'.⁹⁶ This places the controversy in the literary context where curiosity was 'ambivalent and shared', as argued by Neil Kenny. In addition, it seems to have significantly blurred the asymmetrical sexing of curiosity that characterized part of the early modern discourse,⁹⁷ for the defenders of the female sex demonstrated the equality of the sexes in that matter just as most of them absolved women of the responsibility for men's curiosity.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Agrippa von Nettesheim Heinrich Cornelius, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde, translated out of Latine into Englishshe by David Clapam* (London, Thomas Bertelet: 1542).
- Anger Jane, *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women*, in Shepherd S. (ed.), *The Women's Sharp Revenge. Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (London: 1985).
- Anon., *He [sic] begynneth an interlocucion, with an argument, betwyxt man and woman & whiche of them could proue to be most excelle[n]t* (London, W. de Worde: 1525?).

95 Gosynhyll, *The Schole House* 59, v. 100–102.

96 Anon., *A letter Sent by the Maydens of London* sig. Avir.

97 Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 387–388.

- , *The Deceyte of Women to the Instruction and Ensample of all Men Yonge and Olde Newly Corrected* (London, by [W. Copland for] Abraham Vele: 1557?).
- , *A letter Sent by the Maydens of London, to the Vertuous Matrones & Mistresses of the Same, in the Defense of their Lawfull Libertie* (London, Henry Binneman for Thomas Hacket: 1567).
- , *The Praise and Dispraise of Women : gathered out of Sundrye Authors, by John Allday* (London, For William Ponsorby: 1579).
- Anslay Brian, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes* (London, H. Pepwell: 1521).
- Breton Nicholas, *The Praise of Vertuous Ladies in The Will of Will* (London, Thomas Creede: 1599).
- Gosson Stephen, *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen* (London, Richard Johnes: 1596).
- Gosynhyll Edward, *The Schole House*, in E.V. Utterson (ed.), *Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry: Republished Principally from Early Printed Copies in The Black Letter* (London: 1825).
- , *The Praise of All Women, Called Mulierum Pean Very Fruytful and Delectable Unto all the Reders* (W. Myddylton: 1542?).
- Nashe Thomas, *The Anatomie of Absurditie: Contayning a Breefe Confutation of the Slender Imputed Prayses to Feminine Perfection, with a Short Description of the Severall Practises of Youth, and Sundry follies of our Licentious Times* (London, I. Charlewood for Thomas Hacket: 1589).
- Vaughan Robert, *A Dialogue Defensyve for Women against Malycious Detractoures* (London, Robert Wyer for Rychards Banckes: 1542).

Secondary Sources

- Benedict B.M., *Curiosity. A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago – London: 1992).
- Benson P.J., *Texts from the Querelle, 1521–1615* (Aldershot: 2008).
- , *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park: 1992).
- Camden C., *The Elizabethan Woman – Revised edition* (New York: 1975).
- Capern A., *The Historical Study of Women. England 1500–1700* (Basingstoke: 2010).
- Foucault M., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. unnamed (London: 1970).
- Foyster E.A., *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London – New York: 1999).
- Hart C. (ed.), *Disputatio nova contra mulieres. A New Argument Against Women: a Critical Translation from the Latin with Commentary, together with the Original Latin Text of 1595* (New York: 1998).
- Henderson K.U. – McManus B.F., *Half Humankind. Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640* (Urbana – Chicago: 1985).

- Hull S.W., *Women According to Men. The World of Tudor Stuart Women* (Walnut Creek – London – New Delhi: 1996).
- Jordan C., *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: 1990).
- Kelly J., “Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes”, in her *Women, History & Theory* (Chicago – London: 1984).
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).
- Laurence A., *Women in England 1500–1760. A Social History* (London: 1994).
- Mendelson S. – Crawford P., *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 1998).
- Okin S.M., *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: 1992).
- Raymond J., *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: 2003).
- Rogers K., *The Troublesome Helpmate: a History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: 1966).
- Woodbridge L., *Women and the English Renaissance. Literature and the Nature of Womankind 1540–1620* (Urbana – Chicago: 1986).

This Is, and Is Not, Knowledge: Cressida and the Titillation of Male Curiosity in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Laura Levine

Midway through v.ii of *Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites, watching Cressida betray Troilus, says 'A proof of strength she could not publish more / Unless she said my mind is now turned whore' (115–116).¹ Troilus, who is also watching Cressida, takes the balance of the scene to come to the same conclusion. Before he arrives at his verdict 'O false Cressid! false, false, false!' (180) he falls into a state of intense uncertainty, a moment of acute struggle in which he seeks to define what Cressida is. He first rejects the evidence he sees before him and then becomes paralyzed for some 25 lines in a moment of radical doubt. 'This is Diomed's Cressida', he says, and 'This is not she', and most famously, 'This is, and is not, Cressid' (140–149). Whatever Cressida 'is' in this scene, and critics have spent some time arguing the point, she is framed by speakers who offer radically different interpretations of her.² Perhaps more puzzling, when we go to 'test' these various interpretations against what Cressida says and does in the play, they both do and do not fit, both are and are not true. Cressida's key choices generate a series of contradictions which, rather than validating any one interpretation or other made by speakers within the play, seem to frustrate, disable and elude interpretation itself. In comparison to Chaucer, Shakespeare actually strips Cressida of many of the available rationales for the choices she makes, making these choices less – not more – transparent. To what end does the play create such doubt surrounding Cressida, a doubt that bears a strong

-
- 1 Shakespeare William, *The History of Troilus and Cressida*, ed. J. Crewe (New York: 2000). All subsequent quotations are from this edition and included in the body of the text. I would like to thank Lorraine Hirsch and Peter Saenger for comments on earlier drafts of this essay, Jesse Njus for stimulating conversations about Chaucer and Shakespeare, and Emily Erickson for her invaluable research assistance.
 - 2 See Greene G., "Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A Kind of Self'", in Lenz C.R.S. – Greene G. – Neely C.T. (eds.), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana: 1980) 133–149 and Adelman J., "This Is and Is Not Cressid': The Characterization of Cressida", in Garner S.N. – Kehane C. – Sprengnether M. (eds.), *The (M)other Tongue* (Ithaca: 1985) 119–141.

resemblance to the doubt Troilus himself is thrown into in v.ii? To what end does the play kindle curiosity in us?

Writing about curiosity in the early modern period, Neil Kenny has described the way that 'Above all, narratives [about curiosity] [...] showed that curiosity was not a discrete, self-contained passion or vice (or even virtue) within a human being, but rather [...] always part of a sequence of passions, actions and events [...] [following from] something and [giving] rise to something else, in a linear chain of cause and effect [...]'(319).³ Kenny's notion of the chain or sequence of passions in which curiosity forms an unbreakable link would seem to provide an apt description for what happens to Troilus in v.ii as he first rejects, then desperately seeks to know what it is he sees before him. But where the texts Kenny examines typically cast curiosity as a stage on the way to the satisfaction of desire or knowledge, *Troilus and Cressida* suggests a very different 'chain' or narrative. In this narrative curiosity is not a stage on the way to love or the fulfillment of desire, or even knowledge, but, because it is never satisfied, a stage on the way to radical doubt, itself a stage on the way to unmanageable rage. Such rage in this play turns out to be oddly recuperative of masculinity. Where Kenny's analysis seeks to distinguish between those narratives of curiosity in which curiosity is more or less effeminizing, or more or less compatible with masculinity, this essay argues that the exacerbation of curiosity through its frustration is actually recuperative of masculinity, that the world of the play is one in which the rage created by doubt is almost a precondition for masculinity itself.⁴

Previous criticism of *Troilus and Cressida* has tended to vacillate sharply about what Cressida 'is', alternately seeing her as guilty of the charges that male characters like Thersites level at her, or a victim of war, as specifically and

3 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern Germany and France* (Oxford: 2004), especially chapter 4. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and included in the body of the text. For a brief history of curiosity in a cultural as well as philosophical context, see the introduction, *supra*. My reading of curiosity in this chapter aims in contrast at offering a complementary perspective on curiosity; it considers curiosity rather as a hermeneutic drive which is essential for the workings of theatrical fiction as well as psychology. In this respect, it is more in line with M.-G. Lallemand's chapter below, which reads curiosity as a narrative drive in Madeleine de Scudéry's novella.

4 See Levine L., "Troilus and Cressida and the Politics of Rage", in *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579–1642* (Cambridge: 1994) 26–43, for an earlier discussion of doubt as a phase in the chain of emotions leading to rage. The current essay builds on my earlier work by articulating the relation of the production of doubt to discussions of curiosity.

stunningly innocent.⁵ In this essay I focus on what contradictory depictions of Cressida do in the play and what ends might be served by creating in a spectator or reader the same kind of uncertainty experienced by Troilus.

On the one hand there are any number of moments in *Troilus and Cressida* in which speakers register the claim that Cressida is a whore. Well before she has betrayed Troilus, after she has been traded and passed around the Greek camp, Ulysses calls her an 'encounterer', or 'daughter of the game' (IV.v.58–63). Even before she acquiesces to Diomedes, Ulysses claims she will 'sing any man at first sight' (V.ii.10), to which Thersites adds 'if he can take her cliff; she's noted', a claim that acts as if to be able to pin down, define or denote Cressida, a man has to be able to 'take her cliff', or sleep with her. For both speakers, Cressida is too 'open' (25) a text, for Thersites in need of being 'noted', for Ulysses 'unclasp[ing] the tables of [her] thoughts' to 'every ticklish reader' (60–61), as if her legibility were the sign of her wantonness. Thersites ultimately does pin Cressida down to a character from an old play script, in danger of missing her cues: 'Now the pledge; now, now, now!' he says (V.ii.65).

In contrast, for Troilus, Cressida is from the very beginning of the play 'stubborn, chaste against all suit' (I.i.96), a 'hand / In whose comparison all whites are ink' (56), 'a pearl' (99) and, even as late as V.ii after she has betrayed him, beauty's 'soul' (V.ii.140). Perhaps as important as the contrast between what Troilus and Thersites say Cressida is, though, is the way at which they arrive at their respective claims. Troilus explicitly rejects the evidence of his senses,

5 For a statement of the first view, see Voth and Evans who claim 'one judgment [about Troilus and Cressida] has remained constant: Cressida is a mere prostitute', citing critics who have come to similar conclusions in Voth G.L. – Evans O.H., "Cressida and the World of the Play", *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1975) 231–239. See also Girard R., "The Politics of Desire in *Troilus and Cressida*", in Parker P. – Hartman G. (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (New York: 1985). In this essay, Girard argues that Cressida is first sinned against, then sinning. Among the critics who see Cressida's identity as a function of the society which defines it, see G. Greene and J. Dollimore for whom Cressida's discontinuity 'stems not from her nature but from her position in the patriarchal order'. See Dollimore J., *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: 1984), 48, and Greene G., "Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A Kind of Self'", in Lenz C.R.S. – Greene G. – Neely C.T. (eds.), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana: 1980). Feminist criticism itself is divided in its attitudes about Cressida's inconsistencies. Thus Greene reads the kiss scene as evidence of Cressida's betrayal, while G. Tiffany reads Cressida's silences as moments of 'self-erasure'. See Tiffany, G., "Not Saying No: Female Self-Erasure in *Troilus and Cressida*", *Decapitation, Erasure, Gaming and Orientalism in English Literature, Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35, 1 (1993) 44–56.

saying he has a credence in his heart, a hope so 'obstinately' strong that it 'doth invert th'attest of eyes and ears' (123–124). Thersites, watching him, asks, 'Will a swagger himself out on's own eyes?' (138), implying the only reliable evidence is what one sees and hears. Thus, the play not only pits the content of Thersites' interpretation of Cressida (his dismissal of her as a slut) against the content of Troilus' interpretation (his belief in an 'ideal' Cressida), it pits two opposite ways of arriving at an interpretation against each other, the evidence of the senses and the evidence of reason or ideals.

By pitting these two ways of arriving at an interpretation against each other, the play seems to raise the question of which kind of evidence – the evidence of the senses or the evidence of reason – leads to a more reliable way of knowing: Will the play ever choose between these two kinds of evidence or will it simply raise the question, creating in us a curiosity it will only frustrate? According to Richard Popkin, writing about the history of scepticism, these two ways of seeking knowledge are, in fact, for the sceptics whose concerns resurface in the early modern period, the hallmark of the fact that knowledge is impossible, that 'nothing is certain'. Since the evidence for propositions about truth is always based, Popkin says, 'on either sense information or reasoning, and both of these sources are unreliable to some degree [...] there is always some doubt [...]. As a result, the Academic sceptics said that nothing is certain'.⁶ In framing Cressida's actions not only with two opposite interpretations of what she is, but with these two opposite ways of arriving at an interpretation, the play, though it would at first glance seem to ask us to choose between ways of knowing, in fact signals the moment in v.ii itself as a crisis in knowledge, a moment in which competing methods of arriving at interpretation are produced and dramatized as insufficient and unreliable. In so doing, it whets our curiosity about what it is that will ultimately deliver knowledge.

Nor is the signaling of v.ii as a crisis in knowledge limited to the framing of Cressida's actions with two opposite interpretations. The sequence of positions and accompanying claims that Troilus goes through, watching Cressida betray him, the 'story' of his reactions signals a crisis in knowledge as well. In the long speech that follows Cressida handing the sleeve to Diomedes and agreeing to meet him, Troilus begins by denying Cressida was there ('This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida').

By the end of the scene when he has arrived at the judgment 'O false Cressid! false, false, false!' he accepts that Cressida has been there. The first claim necessitates rejecting ocular evidence, what Troilus calls the 'attest of eyes and ears'. The second claim necessitates accepting that evidence. But both claims make

6 Popkin R., *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: 1979) xiv. All further quotations are taken from this edition and included in the body of the text.

dogmatic assertions that act as if knowledge were possible. Popkin, characterizing the sceptical arguments which have come down to us in the writings of Cicero, Augustine and others says 'the aim of the academic sceptical philosophers was to show [...] that the dogmatic philosopher (i.e., the philosopher who asserted he knew some truth about the nature of real things) could not know with absolute certainty the propositions he said he knew' (xiii). Popkin continues, '[t]he Pyrrhonists considered that both the Dogmatists and the Academics asserted too much, one group saying "Something can be known", the other saying "Nothing can be known". Instead, the Pyrrhonians proposed to suspend judgment on all questions on which there seemed to be conflicting evidence, including the question whether or not something could be known' (xv).

In between the two dogmatic positions Troilus takes ('No, this is Diomed's Cressida . . .' and 'O false Cressid! false, false, false!') he is plunged into an abyss of radical doubt, a moment of confusion and paralysis in which he is able to make no kind of knowledge claim at all. After a series of 'if' clauses which presuppose that things have essences, ('If beauty have a soul [...] / If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies, / If sanctimony be the gods delight', 142–143) he arrives at the heart of his problem, which also occupies the bulk of his speech – which is that there is no oneness, no 'rule in unity itself' (144) that would allow him to make a claim one way or the other about Cressida. Rather, 'cause sets up with and against itself' (146) and all he can say is 'This is, and is not, Cressid'.

To say that Troilus is unable to 'say' what Cressida is in v.ii is one way to describe the problem Troilus undergoes in this scene, but another is to say that Cressida is always in the process of eluding the limits of his understanding, always in the process of receding from his ability to define or 'note' her. The moment is then simultaneously paradigmatic of the period's crisis in knowledge itself and at the same time a special case of those narratives of triangulated desire in which men test women's chastity and in so doing lose or nearly lose them; a special case because Troilus' spectatorship is ultimately passive, as impotent and frustrated as his 'curiosity'.⁷ From this point of view, the play can be seen as contrasting two opposite responses to unknowability, to Cressida's undefinability, the paralysis Troilus articulates (and embodies) as he opposes 'instances' to each other and the dogmatism and attendant violence Thersites expresses when he says that to 'note' or define Cressida one has to 'take her cliff' or penetrate her. In contrasting these two reactions, the play would seem to be asking us to choose between them as well. But does it authorize (or rather does it paralyze) either choice, leaving us in a state of unsatisfied curiosity?

7 See Kenny's discussion of such narratives of triangulation, 345–356, especially his discussion of Girard (347).

Writing about Pyrrhonism – and the sceptic who sought to eschew dogmatism and live in a state of ataraxy or peace – Popkin describes Pyrrhonian scepticism as an attitude or practice ‘for opposing evidence both pro and con on any question about what was non-evident so that one would suspend judgment’ (xv). Troilus seems to entertain just such a set of opposed paradoxes or tropes when he says ‘Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto’s gates; / Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven’, but ‘Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself; / The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved, and loosed, / And with another knot, five-finger-tied, / The fractions of her faith, orts of her love [...] / [...] are bound to Diomed’ (v.ii.156–163). But as we shall see, the result for him is not ataraxia or peace but the uncontainable rage that ultimately gets him into battle. v.ii then does not simply oppose interpretations of what Cressida is. Nor does it simply oppose methods of arriving at interpretations in an attempt to foreground a crisis in knowledge or the collapse of a criterion that Troilus experiences. Rather, it depicts such a crisis as leading not to the peace or ataraxy that Pyrrhonists sought, but to rage, despair and war. It portrays the sort of doubt Cressida creates in Troilus as unmanageably destructive and specifically aggression-creating.⁸ Thus the curiosity Cressida elicits always seems to be a stage on the way to aggression – either by leading the dogmatists in the play to immediate thoughts of sexual violence or by generating the paralysis that leads eventually to rage, that rage which draws Troilus into the war.

Troilus’ curiosity, his acute need to know what Cressida is and his inability to satisfy that need are escalating ‘links’ or ‘stages’ in a sequence of events that culminate in rage. We can see this progression of emotions if we trace his reactions to the spectacle before him. Throughout the scene, Ulysses has goaded him with the accusation that he is ‘moved’, that he is not patient, that his ‘displeasure [will] enlarge itself’, that he will ‘flow to great distraction’ that he will ‘break out’. Throughout, Troilus has responded by asserting his ‘guard of patience’ (54). (‘By Jove, I will be patient’ [46], ‘I will be patient, outwardly I will’ [68], ‘I did swear patience’ [84].) But by the end of the scene he has relinquished that very ‘guard of patience’ in his oath to kill Diomed (‘as much as I do Cressid love, / So much by weight hate I her Diomed’ [170–171]). The frustration of his curiosity born of the unsatisfiable need for certainty is a stage on the way to the rage that finally, after many refusals to fight, leads Troilus into the war. ‘I’ll unarm again. / Why should I war without the walls of Troy /

8 See Montaigne Michel de, “Apology for Raymond Sebond”, trans. D. Frame, in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, (Stanford: 1958), for Montaigne on the medicinal effects Pyrrhonians envision, 372, 392–393. Kahn V., *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: 1985) 115–151 for Victoria Kahn’s discussion of Montaigne’s ‘skeptical practice of writing’.

that find such cruel battle within?' (1.i.1–5) he says, beginning the play with the refusal to fight. We see him sneaking across the stage in 1.ii, clearly not having gone to battle (Cressida: 'What sneaking fellow comes yonder?' Pandarus: 'That's Deiphobus. 'Tis Troilus! There's a man, niece! Hem! Brave Troilus, the prince of chivalry'. Cressida: 'Peace for shame, peace!' [222–225]). And as late as 111.i. Troilus has still not gone to battle (Paris: 'How chance my brother, Troilus, went not [to battle]?' [129–130]). It is in fact the sequence of events, the loss of a criterion, the movement through radical doubt and the curiosity it fuels and the confrontation with what cannot be known that he goes through in v.ii. that finally draw Troilus into the war he has refused to fight.

In what way does Troilus' predicament bear on that of the spectator or reader of the play? Troilus' desperation to know what Cressida is in v.ii bears a strong resemblance to those men in the narratives Kenny describes, who are intent on discerning whether their wives have been chaste.⁹ But one might argue that they are more active than Troilus. I have argued elsewhere that doubt is not just something that happens randomly to Troilus, but a state of affairs that Ulysses systematically seeks to bring about in him, just as Ulysses does with other spectators of plays within the play.¹⁰ But if Ulysses seeks to produce doubt in the spectators of the various scenes he stages, *Troilus and Cressida* seeks even more systematically to produce a doubt, what Kenny calls a 'diligent / anxious desire for knowledge' in us, a curiosity that can't be satisfied. It does this by presenting a Cressida who is as contradictory as the one that Troilus witnesses, a Cressida who is and is not Cressid.

Troilus and Cressida invites us, virtually insists, that we 'check' or test what is said about Cressida against the 'real' Cressida who says and does things in the course of the play. But the attempt to test the respective interpretations that Thersites and Troilus offer (or the interpretations of Cressida that Troilus provides at different stages of his trajectory – or even the interpretations that Cressida offers of herself) does not yield 'a' Cressida but a number of contradictory Cressidas. In some ways, the 'real' Cressida over the course of the play ultimately becomes as ephemeral and evanescent for the reader as the sensation of certainty does for Troilus in v.ii. (That this is less frequently the case for the spectator has more to do with the temptation productions give into – to exaggerate, flatten or cut problematic moments – than it does with the text

9 'In many a story, the hero is a man who wonders curiously whether a particular woman had slept with another man or even whether she might do so [...] What makes many of these stories so forceful is that they advise men to avoid such curiosity not because it is ill-founded but because it is well-founded', Kenny says (346).

10 Levine, "*Troilus and Cressida* and the Politics of Rage", especially 32–36.

itself).¹¹ We find ourselves in turn deprived of the ability to make knowledge claims with certainty, kept in a state of aroused and unsatisfied curiosity.

Cressida first seems to give us a sort of key to herself that will explain future actions when she says at the end of I.ii, '[M]ore in Troilus thousandfold I see / Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be'. (277–278) She loves him, but there was never a 'she' yet 'that ever knew / Love got so sweet as when desire did sue' (283–284). Because men only want what they can't have, she cannot show her love. Although her 'heart's content firm love doth bear' nothing of that will 'from [her] eyes appear' (287–288). This is Troilus' Cressida, the one who will invert the attest of eye and ear, not because these faculties 'calumniate', but because she is forced to display the opposite of what she feels in a man's world. If we could use the moment as a standard by which to interpret her throughout the whole play – and the speech's privileged status as a soliloquy alone onstage invites us to do just that – much of her behavior, even her behavior in V.ii, could be assimilated to a reading in which the 'real' Cressida loves Troilus but must adopt behaviors suited to surviving in a man's world.

But no sooner has Cressida established the idea that the 'act' is the 'holding off' and the 'real' is loving Troilus – than she contradicts herself. 'Boldness comes to me now, and brings me heart', she says without having exchanged more than a few lines with him, 'Prince Troilus, I have loved you night and day / For many weary months' (III.ii.109–111). Either she loves him, in which case she is contradicting what she said in I.ii about the way she will have to act to retain his love, or she is 'acting' here and contradicting her previous soliloquy about loving him (But as an 'act', 'I have loved you night and day / For many weary months' makes no sense in a world in which men only want what they can't have.). She tells him that her feelings have gotten the better of her, that she loved him before but not 'till now, so much / that [she] might master it' (116). But a great deal of the rest of the scene can be read as her prediction of her own future falsehood. When she says she spies 'More dregs than water' (64) in the fountain of their love, is she anticipating her own future disloyalty or simply reflecting on the poor odds of their situation? And when – unlike Troilus, who conceives of his oath in terms of truth – she conceives of her oath in terms of falsehood ('If I be false [...] / [...] let them say, 'to stick the heart of falsehood, / 'As false as Cressid', 186–191) is she intimating she already knows she will be false or is the play just juxtaposing her vows to the historical script she is obliged to play out? First because she does the opposite of what she says she is going to do and then because she imagines her vow in terms of

11 Dryden John, *Troilus and Cressida or Truth Found too Late*, ed. W. Scott, *The Dramatic Works of John Dryden* (Edinburgh: 1882) v.ii: 'Alas! I but dissembled love to him [Diomedes]', Dryden's Cressida tells Troilus, in an early iteration of this temptation.

falsehood, the scene seems to erode the standard she has given us for interpreting her in 1.ii.

In one way Act IV seems to restore this standard. 'You men will never tarry' (IV.ii.16), Cressida says the night after she sleeps with Troilus, returning to her old philosophy – if she had held off, Troilus might have tarried. But now the play quite explicitly seems to complicate what she is. 'You men' acts as if she's been through this kind of morning-after situation before, and in that way seems to cast Cressida as a slut. At the same time, Pandarus mocks her with 'How now how go maidenheads?' (23–24) suggesting this is her first time around. Unlike Chaucer's work, where Criseyde is a widow, the play gives no information about Cressida's previous history. More problematically, it consistently strips her of the available motivations which Chaucer provides. Chaucer's Cressid practically has to be abducted before she sleeps with Troilus. Trapped at her uncle's house in a thunderstorm, she is woken in the middle of the night and told that both Troilus and Pandarus will kill themselves if she doesn't take pity on Troilus who, she is told, has gotten the idea that she's betrayed him for a man named Horast. Faint, Troilus is stripped of his clothing and literally thrown into her bed. Similarly, the poem goes to great lengths to explain why Troilus can't run away with her when she is traded and why he can't get some sort of exemption for her from Priam. They can't run away together because if peace breaks out her reputation will be ruined. They can't get Priam to change his mind about trading Cressida, because the Greeks are already so enraged about the theft of Helen that if the Trojans renege on their promise to restore Cressida to Calchas, the Greeks will do what we know (but Troilus does not know) they are going to do anyway: destroy Troy. Where Chaucer almost over-plots his poem, providing rationale upon rationale for Cressida's choices, Shakespeare strips Cressida of any interiority – at least any visible interiority – at all.¹² She is not Diana anymore than Troilus is Actaeon not because she is

12 In contrast, E. Talbot Donaldson, who sees both Criseyde and Cressida as ambiguous, sees Shakespeare's Cressida as less 'veiled in ambiguity' than her predecessor. Her character 'has a marked ambiguity, though it is a different sort from Criseyde's'. Donaldson E.T., "Cressid False, Criseyde Untrue; An Ambiguity Revisited" in Mack M. – Lord G. de F. (eds.), *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: 1982) 74. Donaldson identifies many of the same inconsistencies I treat here but comes to a number of different conclusions: For him Cressida's 'Boldness comes to me now' speech is indicative both of her 'sincerity' (77) and of her 'incompetence' as a flirt (76). Ulysses' dismissal of her as a whore in IV.v is the bitterness of a 'middle-aged self-proclaimed thinker' being beaten by a pretty young girl in a small battle of wits (81). For all her ambiguity though, she is one Cressida 'both unforgivable' and 'yet one for whom [...] it is necessary to feel sympathy' (81).

not 'chaste against all suit', but because she defies curiosity and is never fully visible to him to begin with. It is not just that the play leaves Cressida 'open' to interpretation but that in any number of scenes it provides us with evidence for mutually exclusive interpretations of her, replicating for us the kind of 'Instance, O instance' that Troilus goes through in v.ii. In the kiss scene in which Ulysses first calls Cressida a whore, we could say his claims about her should be discredited because he is the one who suggested Cressida be kissed 'in general', and he is the one Cressida specifically refuses to kiss, first telling him to beg and then telling him to claim his kiss 'when 'tis due', but we could also say it is Ulysses who sets it up so she will never kiss him by begging for his kiss when Helen 'is a maid again' (IV.v.48–51). The play dangles Ulysses' reading of Cressida in front of us but at least as vigorously disables it.

A more important function of the kiss scene may be to demonstrate what will happen to Cressida, a victim of war, if she doesn't submit to one particular Greek and as such to provide a rationale for her decision to give in to Diomedes in v.ii. She may simply consider submission to him better than being gang-raped. But if this is the case, it is a rationale that the play refuses to allow any of its characters to articulate, a rationale provided indirectly, not one that is ever acknowledged by Cressida or anyone else. In that way too, the play invites but refuses to confirm a specific interpretation.

Or it may be that Cressida is simply the ultimate example of 'what's aught but as 'tis valued?' (II.ii.52), the theory of conferred value which circulates periodically throughout the play. Troilus has been a regular (but not consistent) proponent of this theory that estimation itself or how we value creates value. 'Helen must needs be fair', he says, 'When with your blood you daily paint her thus' (I.i.89–90). Paris argues that the 'soil' of Helen's rape can be wiped off by the 'honorable keeping' (II.ii.149) of her, that her worth can be constituted, or at least re-constituted, by how she is treated. And Troilus, in a long demeaning speech that compares women to half-chewed meat, says one doesn't throw them back into the general 'sieve' (71) – one's use of them will determine their value. Ulysses puts the matter in epistemological rather than ontological terms when he tells Achilles that no one can know himself but through the community's reflection ('That no man is the lord of any thing, / Though in and of him there be much consisting, / Till he communicate his parts to others: / Nor doth he of himself know them for aught / Till he behold them formed in th'applause' III.iii.115–119). If we know ourselves by reflection, Cressida herself may become what she is valued as: a slut, an encounterer, someone to be 'kissed in general' (IV.v.21), above all 'false' rather than 'true'. Troilus may be as instrumental as the Greeks who pass her around the Greek camp, in mirroring back to her her potential for falseness by telling her over and over again to 'be true': 'Hear me

love. Be thou but true of heart' (IV.iv.57), he tells her 'be thou true, / And I will see thee' (65–66). 'But yet, be true' (73). Cressida initially responds by challenging him ('I true! how now! what wicked deem is this?' 58) a response which morphs into a promise ('I'll be true', 68) an accusation ('O heavens! you love me not', 82) and ultimately doubt about herself ('Do you think I will [be tempted?]' 90). From one standpoint, Cressida's actions in V.ii can just as easily be seen as the proof of 'what's aught but as 'tis valued?' as they can an index to her character. Little wonder if after being passed around the Greek camp like a whore, she should become one. But by juxtaposing these interpretive possibilities, by pitting them against each other, the play titillates in us a curiosity that mimics Troilus' own need to know.

Why does the play do to us what it does to Troilus in V.ii – titillate and frustrate curiosity? Why does it seem to systematically frustrate attempts to know what Cressida is? One answer may lie in the relentless way in which *Troilus and Cressida* dramatizes again and again the failure of ordinary human means to bring about knowledge of any sort and in particular, the knowledge of what a person is. Early in the play, at the end of I.i, Troilus asks, 'Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne's love, / What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?' (97–98). He asks, in effect, 'What is a person?' But the play seems to dramatize in as many ways as possible the impossibility of answering this particular question. When Alexander goes to define Ajax, the 'very man per se', Ajax turns out to be all attribute ('valiant as the lion, / churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant' I.ii.15–21) and no essence ('there is no man hath a virtue that he / hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attainment but he / carries some stain of it' 24–26). One could argue that this state of affairs is a reflection on Ajax, not on knowability per se, but a moment later the scene dramatizes the impossibility of knowing 'what a man is' by either reason or by the senses. 'Do you know what man is?' 'Do you know a man if you see him?' (246, 63), Pandarus asks Cressida hysterically in the refrain that punctuates the scene. In the first half of their conversation he fails to establish 'what a man is' by reason or logic – reason that can almost be reduced to propositional logic. In the second half of the scene he fails to establish 'what a man is' by ocular evidence. Thus, in an attempt to prove that Troilus is a better man than Hector, he reduces himself first to a tautology: 'Well, I say Troilus is Troilus' ($x=x$) and then to a contradiction in terms 'Himself! no, he's not himself' (x is not = to x ; 65, 75). In the second half of the scene Pandarus establishes the impossibility of knowing a man through ocular evidence: ('What sneaking fellow comes yonder?' Cressida asks as Troilus passes. Pandarus says, 'Where? yonder? That's Deiphobus', and then modifies to 'Tis Troilus! There's a man, niece! Hem! Brave Troilus! The prince of chivalry!' until Cressida says, 'peace for shame, peace', 222–225).

Thus the play might refuse to give us a knowable Cressida in the service of a larger argument about the impossibility of knowledge itself. Where the narratives Kenny treats – narratives of men obsessed with determining whether their wives are chaste – suggest that there is at least such a thing as knowledge, *Troilus and Cressida* virtually suggests knowledge is impossible; virtually because Cassandra stands at the center of the play and what she knows is never called into question, though its condition is incommunicability.

But at least one other rationale lies behind the play's insistent arousal of curiosity. From the very beginning of the play, Troilus has accused himself of being effeminate. Unarming and refusing to fight, he says he is 'weaker than a woman's tear [...] / Less valiant than the virgin in the night' (9–10). When we see him in I.ii he is sneaking across the stage, clearly not having gone into battle, and as late as III.i Paris is asking why Troilus 'went not' to fight.

Whenever a man won't fight in this play the community mirrors back to him the judgment that he is effeminate. Ulysses describes the way that Achilles, grown 'dainty of his worth', lies upon a 'pressed bed lolling', 'break[ing] scurriel jests' with Patroclus 'upon a lazy bed' (I.iii.147–162). Patroclus himself tells Achilles, that a woman 'impudent and mannish grown' is not 'more loathed than an effeminate man / in time of action' (III.iii.217–219), that he stands condemned for Achilles' refusal to fight because of Achilles' love for him. Both Achilles and Troilus refuse to fight for most of the play, and in both cases the refusal is associated with a love.¹³ It is only when Troilus is plunged into a state of radical doubt and unmanageable uncertainty that he finally goes into battle. The doubt that the Pyrrhonists believed was supposed to deliver ataraxy or peace is pictured as engendering sufficient rage to propel men to perform in battle their masculinity. It is in this sense that curiosity can be seen as a kind of pre-condition for masculinity.

It is Paris who articulates the logic behind this paradigm when he tells Helen that her 'white enchanting fingers' shall do more than 'the edge of steel' or 'force of Greekish sinews' or all the island kings can do, 'disarm great Hector' (III.i.144–147). In a world where beauty effeminizes and 'disarms', where love weakens, rage restores masculinity. Curiosity as the unsatisfiable need to know, especially when it cannot be satisfied, is imagined as one link on a chain which leads to this rage.

13 This is true for both homoerotic and heterosexual love: Patroclus tells Achilles that he stands condemned for Achilles' refusal to fight, but elsewhere we hear it is Achilles' oath to Polyxena that keeps him out of battle.

It is in this one disturbing way that the play can be imagined to 'rehabilitate' curiosity: by keeping its male protagonist in a perpetual state of uncertainty and unresolved doubt, the play draws him into battle and in this way keeps him involved in the performance of his masculinity. But what are the implications of keeping us in a similar state of uncertainty? What are the implications of arousing and failing to satisfy our curiosity? Potentially, *Troilus and Cressida* mobilizes the same kind of rage in an actual spectator.

To what kind of spectator would such rage make a difference? Anti-theatricalists during the period shared the play's anxieties about effeminization, but ascribed to theater itself the effeminizing power that Paris attributes to Helen's beauty. For Stephen Gosson theater 'effeminate[d] the minde'.¹⁴ In theaters 'effeminate gesture [...] ravish[ed] the sence, and wanton speache [...] whette desire' to inordinate lust (22). 'Our wrestling at armes is turned to wallowing in ladies lappes; our courage to cowardice', he complained in *School of Abuse*. Gosson yearns for an England of old in which men could 'suffer watching and labor [...] they used slender weapons, went naked, and wer good soldiours' (24). By creating a spectator who moves through the stages of curiosity to doubt to frustration to rage, *Troilus and Cressida* mobilizes its own male spectator, organizes in him the affect necessary for the performance of masculinity and the militaristic ideal which demands that performance and thus prevents him from becoming 'weaker than a woman's tear'. Curiosity then is not only a stage on the way to rage but a stage on the way to a rage that must be endlessly maintained to ensure masculinity be performed.

But what about the women in the audience – what function might a contradictory or an unknowable Cressida serve for an imagined female spectator? In a later pamphlet, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, Gosson retells Xenophon's description of a performance of the wedding of Bacchus and Ariadne. 'When Bacchus beheld [Ariadne]', Gosson says, 'expressing in [her] daunce the passions of love, he placed himself somewhat neere to her and embraced her, she with an amorous kind of feare and strangeness as though shee would thruste him away with her little finger and pull him again with both her hands, somewhat timorously, and doubtfully entertained him'. What is most striking about Gosson's description is his apparent belief that spectators at a production will hypnotically repeat what they have seen before them on the stage:

14 Gosson Stephen, *The School of Abuse* (rpt. London: 1841) 19. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and included in the body of the text. For a fuller discussion of anxieties of effeminization in anti-theatrical tracts of the period and the magical beliefs these anxieties presuppose, see my *Men in Women's Clothing* 10–25.

At this the beholders began to shoute. When Bacchus rose up, tenderly lifting Ariadne from her seate, no small store of curtesie passing between them, the behoulders rose up, every man stood on tippe toe, and seemed to hover over the playe. When they sware, the company sware, when they departed to bedde; the company presently was set on fire, they that were married posted home to their wives, they that were single, vowed very solemnly, to be wedded.¹⁵

From the standpoint of this assumption, the belief that spectators compulsively mimic what they see before them, an incoherent and unknowable Cressida serves a specific purpose: that of blocking the kind of fusion between actor and spectator that anti-theatricalists fear. For Gosson, women in the audience were in danger of becoming whores from the moment they allowed themselves to enter the theater and be seen: 'If you doe but [...] joyne looks with an amorous gazer', he said in his epilogue 'To the Gentlewomen, Citizens of London', 'you have already made your selves assaultable, and yielded your cities to be sacked'. Romulus built the first theater as a 'horsfaire for hoores [...] and set out playes to gather the faire women together, that every one of his souldiers might take where hee liked a snatch for his share'. Desire, for Gosson, moves with a kind of lightning speed and inevitability from thought to action, even as it moves 'from pleasure to slouth, from slouth to sleepe, [...] sleepe to sinne, [...] sinne to death, [...] death too the Divil'.¹⁶ A Cressida who both 'is, and is not, Cressida' will interrupt this progression by disabling the kind of identification that Gosson feared. Cressida's ability to titillate curiosity without satisfying it both incarnates what anti-theatricalists fear and offers a kind of talisman against it.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dryden John, *Troilus and Cressida or Truth Found too Late*, in *The Dramatic Works of John Dryden*, ed. W. Scott (Edinburgh: 1882).

15 Gosson S., *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, in A.F. Kinney (ed.), *Markets of Bawdrie: The Dramatic Criticism of Stephen Gosson*, Salzburg Studies in Literature 4 (Salzburg: 1974) 193–194.

16 Gosson, *The School of Abuse* 14.

Gosson Stephen, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, in Kinney A.F. (ed.), *Markets of Bawdrie: The Dramatic Criticism of Stephen Gosson*, Salzburg Studies in Literature 4 (Salzburg: 1974).

———, *The School of Abuse* (rpt. London: 1841).

Montaigne Michel de, "Apology for Raymond Sebond" in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D. Frame (Stanford: 1958).

Shakespeare William, *The History of Troilus and Cressida*, ed. J. Crewe (New York: 2000).

Secondary Sources

Adelman J., " 'This Is and Is Not Cressid': The Characterization of Cressida", in Garner S.N. – Kehane C. – Sprengnether M. (eds.), *The (M)other Tongue* (Ithaca: 1985) 119–141.

Dollimore J., *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: 1984).

Donaldson E.T., "Cressid False, Criseyde Untrue; An Ambiguity Revisited", in Mack M. – Lord G. de F. (eds.), *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: 1982).

Girard R., "The Politics of Desire in *Troilus and Cressida*", in Parker P. – Hartman G. (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (New York: 1985).

Greene G., "Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A Kind of Self'", in Lenz C.R.S. – Greene G. – Neely C.T. (eds.), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana: 1980).

Kahn V., *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: 1985).

Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern Germany and France* (Oxford: 2004).

Levine L., "Troilus and Cressida and the Politics of Rage", in *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579–1642* (Cambridge: 1994) 26–43.

Popkin R., *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: 1979).

Tiffany G., "Not Saying No: Female Self-Erasure in *Troilus and Cressida*", in *Decapitation, Erasure, Gaming and Orientalism in English Literature, Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35, 1 (1993) 44–56.

Voth G.L. – Evans O.H., "Cressida and the World of the Play", *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1975) 231–239.

‘Too Curious a Secrecy’: Curiosity in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*

Laetitia Coussement-Boillot

‘Too curious a secrecy’, is a quote from the prose romance *Urania*, describing one of the heroines’ attitude to concealment. Restless and melancholy because she secretly loves her cousin, Pamphilia is depicted as: ‘[...] walking up and downe a pretty space, blaming her fortune, but more accusing her love, who had the heart to grieve her, while shee might more justly have chid herselfe, whose feare had forc’d her to too curious a secrecie’.¹ The adjective ‘curious’ here can be understood as ‘careful’, ‘meticulous’, ‘scrupulous’, not as ‘inquisitive’ which would contradict the idea of ‘secrecy’ that immediately follows. The choice of the term ‘curious’ in relation to secrecy may appear surprising at first. It highlights Pamphilia’s submission to the injunction of secrecy, along with modesty, chastity and silence, notions which commonly defined the early modern woman. In the above quote, Wroth also hints at a tension between disclosure and concealment, since the secrecy is ‘forc’d’ in other words self-inflicted, as Pamphilia is afraid to disclose her feelings.

As shown by Neil Kenny in his book *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories*,² in the early modern period, curiosity was a particularly elusive, ambiguous notion. The term was not only highly polysemous, it could also be connoted positively or negatively: curiosity could apply to a person and refer to carefulness, scrupulousness, accuracy, skill, cleverness, or ingenuity. Pushed to extremes, it could mean fastidiousness, over-elaborateness. It could also refer to the subject’s legitimate desire to know. However, even that sort of curiosity could become synonymous with nosiness or over-inquisitiveness. From a different perspective, curiosity could apply to an object that aroused interest because it was novel or rare. Hence the distinctions delineated by Neil Kenny between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ curiosity, and between good and bad curiosity. As he pointed out in his book, curiosity enjoyed an ‘extraordinary moral

1 All subsequent references to Lady Mary Wroth’s *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* come from the edition by Josephine A. Roberts, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Tempe, Arizona: 2005), first printing 1995, Book 1, 91.

2 Kenny N., *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998).

reversibility'.³ In the light of Kenny's comments, another quote from *Urania* may help us gauge in a preliminary way how Wroth capitalised on the complexity of contemporary notions of curiosity in her writing. Thus, in the third book, the two heroines of the romance, Urania and Pamphilia, have been shipwrecked on an island where they discover a mysterious building:

They found a round building like a Theater, carved curiously, and in mighty pillars; light they might in many places discern between the pillars of the upper row, but what was within, they could not discover, nor find the gate to enter it. With this they returned, the Ladies proceeded, and arriving there, found it just as the servants had described; but more curiously beholding it, they found in one of the pillars, a letter ingraven, and on another, another letter. They understood not the meaning, while Pamphilia (more desirous of knowledge then the rest) went as far behind that pillar as she could, and there perceived a space, as if halfe of the pillar and then a plaine place, and so halfe of the other behind it had left a passage through them.⁴

In this quotation, the adverb 'curiously' occurs twice, with multiple meanings: in the first phrase, 'carved curiously' refers to the strangeness of the monument, as well as to its elaborateness and elegance. It may therefore allude both to the building as a curious object and to the artist's skillfulness. The second adverb in 'more curiously beholding', is explicitly linked with sight and refers to the onlookers' desire to know what the building is, and even more, what it may be hiding. As the author suggests, the building's curiousness is connected with its mysteriousness: 'what was within, they could not discover, nor find the gate to enter it'. The building seems to have been elaborately designed so as to conceal a secret. Its curious outside stimulates the onlookers' wish to go inside, to know what is hidden. Here Pamphilia embodies the curious viewer, as Wroth reminds us in the parenthetical clause: she is 'more desirous of knowledge then the rest'. The subject's curiosity falls on curious objects and those curious objects in turn reinforce the subject's curiosity.

The passage quoted above testifies to the intertwining of the subjective and objective meanings of curiosity, as well as to the author's familiarity with the different meanings of the word. In the 661 pages of the standard modern edition of *Urania*, for example, there are more than sixty occurrences of the word 'curiosity' and its cognates, 'curiousness', the adjective 'curious' and the adverb

³ Kenny, *Curiosity* 14.

⁴ Wroth, *Urania* Book 3, 373.

'curiously'.⁵ Yet, despite the recurrence of the notion of 'curiosity' in *Urania*, I believe Lady Mary Wroth's perspective on curiosity has received little critical attention so far. Recently, Aurélie Lentsch-Griffin⁶ has shown melancholy's overwhelming presence in *Urania*, and how it is used by Wroth to legitimise her authorial position but critics have largely focused on Lady Mary Wroth's inscription in her family lineage and the assertion of her poetic and authorial self.⁷ This is understandable since Wroth was born into a pre-eminent literary family as Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney's niece. Shortly after the publications of the first part of *Urania* in 1621 (the only part published during her lifetime), a quarrel erupted between Wroth and Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham who accused Wroth of having slandered him in the episode of Seralius and his father-in-law. This provides clear evidence that *Urania* was read by Wroth's contemporaries as a 'roman à clef' but, despite the scandal following the publication of the first book, Wroth went on to write the second part of her prose romance.⁸ However, the present study will focus on

5 I am referring to Josephine A. Roberts's edition.

6 See Lentsch-Griffin's Ph.D.: "L'*Urania* de Lady Mary Wroth (1587?–1651?): une poétique de la mélancolie", Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, 2013 (to be published with Garnier in 2016). In a recently published article, she explores the link between curiosity, vanity and melancholy: the moral condemnation of curiosity associated with vanity in the Christian tradition manifests itself through melancholy. See Lentsch-Griffin A., "Curiosité(s), vanité et mélancolie dans *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) de Lady Mary Wroth", *Études Épistémè* 27, 2015. URL: <http://episteme.revues.org/491> (accessed 8 August 2015).

7 See Brennan M.G., "Creating female authorship in the early seventeenth century: Ben Jonson and Lady Mary Wroth", in Justice G.L. – Tinker N. (eds.), *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550–1800* (Cambridge: 2002) 73–93; Fienberg N., "Mary Wroth's Poetics of the Self", *Studies in English Literature* 42 (Winter 2002) 121–136. See also by the same author, "Mary Wroth and the invention of female poetic subjectivity", in Miller N.J. – Waller G. (eds.), *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England* (Knoxville: 1991) 175–190; Hackett H., "A book, and solitariness: Melancholia, Gender and Literary Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's *Urania*", in McMullan G. (ed.), *Renaissance Configurations: Voices / Bodies / Spaces 1580–1690* (London: 2001) 64–85; Miller N.J., "Not much to be marked': Narrative of the Woman's Part in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*", *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 29 (Winter 1989) 121–137; Quilligan M., "The Constant Subject: Instability and Female Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems", in Harvey E.D. – Eisaman Maus K. (eds.), *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Chicago – London: 1990) 307–335; Smith R., "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilantus*: The Politics of Withdrawal", *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (September 2000) 408–431.

8 Josephine A. Roberts undertook the publication of *The Second Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, which was completed by Suzanne Gossett and Janel Mueller, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Tempe, Arizona: 1999).

The First Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania, i.e. Wroth's published work, in an attempt to demonstrate that from the start of her writing career Wroth seems to have been particularly aware of the polysemy and elusiveness of the term and concept of 'curiosity'. Throughout this work she explores both good and bad inquisitiveness, and sometimes intertwines the two, but what is most striking and original is Wroth's attempt to rehabilitate female curiosity through moralization and aesthetization.

In the opening pages, the title character, Urania, has just discovered she is not a shepherd's daughter. She laments the ignorance of her parentage, wishing she knew who she was: 'O ignorance, can thy dulness yet procure so sharpe a pain? and that such a thought as makes me now aspire to knowledge?'⁹ From the start, by her aspiring to knowledge, the heroine is associated with curiosity and in the following paragraphs, she is described as exploring the surroundings of the pastoral setting, ascending a great rock and discovering a cave: 'she fearing nothing but the continuance of her ignorance, went in'.¹⁰ Once inside the room, she sees a light which prompts her to continue her exploration: 'She curious to see what this was, with her delicate hands put the naturall ornament aside, discerning a little doore, which she putting from her, passed through it into another roome'.¹¹ Once in the second room, Urania first discovers a poem written on a piece of paper before catching sight of a reclining man:

[...] she stept unto him, whom she found not dead, but laid upon his back, his head a little to her wards, his armes foulded on his brest, haire long, and beard disordered, manifesting all care; but care it selfe had left him: curiousnesse thus farre affoorded him, as to bee perfectly discerned the most exact peece of miserie; Apparrell hee had sutable to the habitation, which was a long gray robe.¹²

Urania's curiosity or inquisitiveness leads her to discover a man, Perissus, who is the very embodiment of sorrow: 'the most exact peece of miserie'. From the outset the woman is the curious subject and the man the curious object. Moreover, the woman's inquisitiveness is marked positively in the narrative since a few lines below she justifies such curiosity as her desire to help the grief-stricken Perissus: 'wherefore favour me with the knowledge of your grieve; which heard, it may be I shall give you some counsell, and comfort in your

9 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 1.

10 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 2.

11 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 2.

12 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 3.

sorrow'.¹³ Urania's curiosity eventually leads her to advise him to take action and to avenge his beloved Limena.

Urania's curiosity is thus the starting point of the romance in at least two distinct ways: she is curious about herself and about the others. First she is looking for her origins and then she is curious about Perissus' story. This story will be followed by countless others inserted in the narrative as Urania and her friends or relatives meet numerous secondary characters. For example, after taking leave of Perissus, Urania is saved from a she-wolf by two young men. Once rescued, Urania again behaves like a most curious subject: 'she curteously desired them, that since they had rescued her, she might know the men that saved her, and the adventure brought them thither'.¹⁴ The two strangers take her to the cave where they live with their sister and father and the latter agrees to tell his story both to Urania and, for the first time, to his three children: 'for now shal you know that, which I have til this present kept from you'.¹⁵ Thus begins the second inserted narrative after Perissus and Limena's initial story of thwarted love. Yet the moment of revelation is postponed by the arrival of a mysterious gentleman, Parselius, who will become Urania's lover: 'They being ready to sit, and heare the story, a mans voice made them stay, and Urania intreated (as in lesse danger if seene then the other) to go forth, she perceiv'd a gentleman of that delicacy for a man, as she was struck with wonder . . .'.¹⁶ Urania and Parselius fall in love at first sight and now it is the man, Parselius, who is curious to know who the shepherdess is: 'let me bee so much favour'd of you, as to be permitted to aske some questions'.¹⁷ Urania starts telling him about her adoption by shepherds on the island of Pantalaria, before taking him to the cave where the old man asks Parselius to recount his story first before he reciprocates: 'sit I beseech you downe, and tell me who you are, that then I may discourse to you the lamentable fortune I and these my children are fallen into'.¹⁸ Interestingly, whereas we could have expected the old man's story to come first, the order is reversed, which once more postpones the disclosure of what should have been the second narrative of the romance. Only after listening to Parselius, does the old man reveal he is the 'unfortunate king of Albania' in exile.¹⁹

13 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 4.

14 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 20.

15 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 21.

16 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 21.

17 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 21.

18 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 23.

19 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 24.

Some conclusions can be drawn from this briefly sketched out intricate pattern of inserted narratives repeated all along the romance. First, the protagonists' curiosity provides the driving force, the impetus of Wroth's narrative. The genre of the romance itself, relying on the concealment and discovery of the characters' identities, naturally places narrative emphasis on the protagonists' curiosity as a 'discursive thread, strand, or tendency' to quote Neil Kenny.²⁰ Secondly, curiosity is not restricted to women. Parselius inquires about Urania's identity before he insists on hearing the King of Albania's story. However, because Wroth tends to focus more on women characters in her romance (especially on two heroines, Pamphilia and Urania, who echo her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney's two male protagonists, Musidorus and Pyrocles in the *Arcadia*), women's curiosity is foregrounded. Thirdly, it seems Wroth is playing with the reader's curiosity by constantly delaying the end of her numerous narratives, and inserting tales within tales which, at times, make the romance confusing and challenging for readers to follow. Many critics have also pointed out that Wroth's romance could be read as a 'roman à clef' where, as a member of Queen Anne's circle, she was a privileged witness of life at court and reflected such autobiographical details in her romance. For instance the couple formed by Pamphilia and Amphilantus has been identified as an analogue of Lady Mary Wroth herself and her cousin William Herbert, Mary Sidney's son, with whom she had an affair and two illegitimate children. Other female characters in *Urania* stand as avatars for Mary Wroth herself, the most obvious being Lindamira, whose name is a near anagram of Lady Mary, and whose story, narrated by Pamphilia in the third book, mirrors episodes of the author's life. An awareness of the autobiographical relevance of these allusions undoubtedly meant that Wroth's contemporary readers would have been titillated by such details and the challenge of trying to discover who the fictional masks were concealing. The choice of the genre of the romance was therefore particularly apt as a method of displaying the protagonists' curiosity at the diegetic level in her fiction and to stimulate her readership's curiosity at the extra-diegetic level.²¹

At a diegetic level, it seems that curiosity is not always seen as a positive force stirring the protagonists into action and allowing the unravelling of the plot. Far from giving us a univocal picture, Wroth reminds the reader of the dangers inherent in curiosity. In the first book, for example, the author refers to Antissia's inquisitiveness when she surmises that her friend Pamphilia is

20 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 309.

21 On the use of curiosity at the diegetic and extra-diegetic level, see also Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand's and Laura Levine's chapters in this volume.

also her rival for the love of Amphilantus: 'My curiositie', said the other, 'was and is, lest it should bee hee whom I affect'.²² Antissia's curiosity is rooted in suspicion and jealousy, as Pamphilia herself remarks:

[C]an so base an humour as suspition creepe into so brave a heart as Antissia's? and to gaine such power there, as to make her distrust her friend? truly I am sorry for it; and would advise you for honours sake, quickly to banish that Devill from you, which otherwise will daily increase new mischiefes.²³

Pamphilia points out the harmful consequences of curiosity which here causes Antissia to 'distrust her friend', thereby threatening the friendship between the two women. This threat is all the more significant as the constancy of female friendship, as opposed to male inconstant love,²⁴ is a celebrated value throughout the romance. The use of words such as 'Devill' and 'mischiefes' highlights the threat of chaos deriving from Antissia's curiosity. Yet it would be simplistic to oppose Antissia's bad curiosity to Pamphilia's rejection of it. Antissia's inquisitiveness shows her clear-sightedness, whereas Pamphilia's answer is deeply ironic as she lies to her friend Antissia when she denies being her rival in love. Pamphilia placates her friend's suspicions by deceiving her, stressing for the reader the link between curiosity and deceit.

In the first book, the encounter with the Throne of Love illustrates another dark side of curiosity, more specifically the link between curiosity and deceit. The Throne of Love is a building situated on top of a hill in Cyprus. Made up of three towers – the tower of desire, the tower of love and the tower of constancy – it is 'a rare and admirable palace',²⁵ which baffles the viewers by appealing to their curiosity: 'Comming towards it, they imagined it some Magicall work, for so daintily it appear'd in curiositie, as it seem'd as if it hung in the ayre, the Trees, Fountains, and all sweet delicacies being discerned through it'.²⁶ The link between curiosity and magic, therefore illusion, is ominous and hints at some danger lurking in this enticing place full of 'sweet delicacies'. In the following lines, Wroth expands on this association between curiosity and magic:

22 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 95.

23 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 95.

24 On this topic, see for instance, Quilligan, "The Constant Subject".

25 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 47.

26 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 48.

They all beheld this place with great wonder, Parselius resolving it was some Enchauntment; wherefore was the nicer how they proceeded in the entring of it: while they were thus in question, there came an aged Man, with so good a countenance and grave aspect, as it strucke reverence into them, to be shewed to him, by them. He saluted them thus: 'Faire company, your beholding this place with so much curiosity, and besides your habits makes me know you are strangers, therefore fit to let you understand the truth of this brave Building, which is dedicated to Love.'²⁷

We find once again the intertwining between the objective curious building and the viewers' subjective curiosity. Looking at the building with 'great wonder', the protagonists wish to know more: 'how they proceeded in the entring of it'. Twice in the description of the Throne of love, curiosity is explicitly connected with magic, whether it be an 'enchantment' or 'some magicall work'. This is borne out in the following pages when some of the viewers are imprisoned in the palace. Curiosity is thus associated with danger, yet that same enchantment will allow Wroth to extoll the heroic couple, Pamphilia and Amphilantus, who will free their friends at the end of the first book. In the Throne of Love episode overall, therefore, the author emphasises the ambiguous potential of curiosity which leads Urania and some of her followers to imprisonment, before also allowing Pamphilia to rescue them.

In the third book, a deformed echo of the Throne of Love episode provides yet another example of the dangers of curiosity; when Pamphilia and Urania, shipwrecked on the island, discover another palace, the two women have completely different reactions. Urania, remembering the episode from the first book, which led to her imprisonment, is wary and reluctant to come near the 'most sumptuous building':²⁸ 'I feare this storme, and adventure'.²⁹ Contrary to Urania's caution, Pamphilia's curiosity prevails; she leads the way inside the building:

She looked for the key, while the other three did likewise busie them selves in such search, having found in every plaine such a place, Pamphilia at last found the key, at the foote of one of the pillars. She tooke it, and tried to open it, which presently it did, as if opening it selfe willingly to her power, or renting it selfe asunder, to let her goe in.

²⁷ Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 48.

²⁸ Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 372.

²⁹ Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 372.

Instantly appeared as magnificent a Theater, as Art could frame. The other Princes seeing it open came to Pamphilia and all of them stood gazing on it; there was a Throne which nine steps ascended unto, on the top were fowre rich chayers of Marble, in which were more most delicate and sumptuous imbroider'd cushions, a carpet of rich embroidery lying before, and under them. Needs this richnes must be neerer beheld, and (like women) must see novelties; nay even Pamphilia was inticed to vanity in this kind. In they goe, and venture to ascend the Throne, when instantly the sweetest musicke, and most enchanting harmony of voyces, so overruld thier sences, as they thought no more of any thing, but went up, and sate downe in the chayers. The gate was instantly lock'd againe, and so was all thought in them shut up for their comming forth thence [...].³⁰

Pamphilia is the one who finds the key, an unfortunate act which will lead once more to the protagonists' entrapment. The extract testifies to Wroth's condemnation of women's bad curiosity. She seems to endorse early modern assumptions about women's fondness for riches, as evidenced by the 'sumptuous imbroider'd cushions', 'the carpet of rich embroidery lying before, and under them', the 'richnes' that needs to be 'neerer beheld'. She also reminds us of the *topos* according to which women were attracted to 'novelties'. Her use of parentheses in this extract serves to emphasize even more women's inherently bad curiosity. As is plainly stated, the otherwise perfect Pamphilia is not immune from the attraction of novelty, which turns her curiosity into vanity: 'nay even Pamphilia was inticed to vanity in this kind'. Worse still, Pamphilia as leader of the group can be held responsible for everybody's imprisonment.

As far as her two heroines, Urania and Pamphilia, are concerned, Wroth's perspective on women's curiosity is ambivalent: from the outset she foregrounds Urania's good and legitimate curiosity to know who she is, yet she condemns Pamphilia's vain curiosity to enter the palace. Throughout *Urania*, good and bad curiosity are present as if, in narrative terms, Wroth's ambiguous treatment of curiosity matches the notion's very ambiguity. Yet when surveying the various occurrences of the notion in the whole of the romance, positive associations outnumber the negative ones which may point to a significantly underrated aspect of Wroth's achievement in *Urania* being a reevaluation of curiosity through moralization and aesthetization.

As already mentioned, the world of *Urania* mirrors that of the court frequented by Lady Mary when she was a member of Queen Anne's close circle,

30 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 373.

from her marriage to Sir Robert Wroth in 1604 onward. Her husband was close to King James with whom he shared a passion for hunting, which led to his appointment as Riding Forester. During the early years of her marriage, Mary Wroth was an active figure in the court and she appeared in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* performed in 1605 and his *Masque of Beauty* in 1608. Moreover, Jonson dedicated *The Alchemist* to Lady Mary Wroth and praised her poetry. As pointed out by Paul Salzman:

the publication of *Urania* can be seen as Wroth's attempt to reinstate herself at the centre of the court activity from which she had been removed, perhaps because of her liaison with William Herbert, but also because, following the death of Queen Anne in 1619, women were further alienated from court life (Wroth's father had been Anne's Lord Chamberlain).³¹

Most of the heroes and heroines of *Urania* are courtiers and are recurrently described as 'matchless', 'excellent', 'virtuous', 'rare', and 'curious', which turns them into admirable objects of curiosity worthy of being examined by the reader. This is even more obvious in the case of women courtiers who are repeatedly described as 'curious' in the moral sense, i.e. as 'careful', 'scrupulous', 'meticulous', as evidenced by the description, in the fourth book, of a sad woman who has been utterly transformed by the pangs of love:

'Did you ever', said hee, 'see a sweet Lady so much changed as shee is? I knew her, and so did you, a faire, dainty, sweet woman, noble and freely disposed, a delicate Courtier, curious in her habites, danced, rid, did all things fit for a Court, as well as any brave Lady could doe? what can change her thus? they say shee is in love.'³²

'Curious' here is but one of the attributes listed to define the perfect woman courtier. Far from meaning 'nosy' or 'strange', 'curious' denotes the woman's former careful, adequate, courtly behaviour. In a similar vein, a few pages later, another woman, Celina (a shepherdess whom the Prince of Venice loves) is depicted as utterly transformed by the power of love: '[S]he lying

31 Salzman P., "Mary Wroth: From Obscurity to Canonization", *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: 2006) 63. For a biographical account of Lady Mary's life, see also *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. J. Roberts (Baton Rouge: 1983) 3–40. Detailed information about Wroth's relationship with William Herbert can be found in Waller G., *The Sidney Family Romance* (Detroit: 1993).

32 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 4, 631.

on the ground, carelesse of order, or modesty, allmost distracted, and lying in the most disordered Posture that could be, for so discreet and curious a woman, tumbling on the ground, clapping her breast, sobbing, weeping, crying . . .'³³ The meaning of 'curious' here is again that of 'meticulous', 'scrupulous'. Collocated with the adjective 'discreet', it evokes the early modern archetype of the modest woman. In both these examples, which describe a woman's behaviour, 'curious' means just the opposite of 'inquisitive' and becomes a highly positive term. Going against the widespread tendency of her time that viewed women's curiosity as inherently bad, the author sees the curious woman as a careful, meticulous, woman who respects *decorum* and decency. An episode in the second book supports this moral reevaluation of the 'curious' woman. A secondary male character, Alanius, has become mad because of his lover's rejection: 'till I lost, not my selfe, but my witts, growing as madd, and doing as many tricks, as ever creature distracted did or could committ'.³⁴ Interestingly, his mad behaviour anticipates that of Celina mentioned above. He then relates how he was cured from madness by a 'virtuous woman': '[M]y friend Menander, who conducted me unto a vertuous Lady, skilfull in Physicke, who never left with curious medicines, and as curious paines, till I recover'd my lost wits againe'.³⁵ The 'curious medicines, and as curious paines' may refer both to the strangeness of the woman's cure and to her dedicated, scrupulous care since she 'never left' her patient before his complete recovery. As pointed out by Neil Kenny³⁶ and other critics, 'care' and 'curiosity' have a common etymology. The Latin *cura* gave rise to the adjective *curiosus*, which in turn led to *curiositas*. In Latin, 'curiosus' denoted someone characterized by 'care, concern, anxiety, diligence'.³⁷ In the episode narrated by Alanius, the woman's 'curious' devices are linked with her care, her virtue, her goodness; she is the one who saves him and ultimately makes reunion with his beloved Liana possible. This episode provides yet another occurrence in which the adjective 'curious' is associated with a virtuous woman's careful attention and takes on a morally positive meaning. It is reminiscent of how the defenders of women used the first meaning of 'curious' as 'careful' in order to deny the accusations of idleness levelled against women during the Tudor controversy about women, as shown by Armel Dubois-Nayt in her chapter included in this volume.

33 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 4, 646.

34 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 2, 257.

35 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 2, 257.

36 Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe* 35.

37 Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe* 35.

It is also worth pointing out that in the romance, the word 'curious' is not used to describe freaks or monsters, i. e. objects of contemptible curiosity. When Wroth depicts monsters, which are staple elements of the genre of romance, they are plainly described as 'monstrous', but not as 'curious' or 'curiosities'. By the same token, there is scant mention of a cabinet of curiosities in *Urania*.³⁸ As critic Bernadette Andrea has shown,³⁹ women's cabinets are often referred to as places of privacy and secrecy, which allow them to be on their own, to think, pray, or sometimes write. In the early modern period, the word 'cabinet' could also refer to a box containing pieces of writing, as is exemplified in the story of Veralinda's cabinet in the third book. Veralinda was the daughter of the King of Frigia by his second wife. Her jealous brothers decided to get rid of her but she was saved by a servant who took her to Arcadia where she was brought up by the King's shepherd. When her surrogate father was ordered to do so, he sent her away from Arcadia in order for her to discover her real identity.⁴⁰ As he bade her farewell, he gave her a cabinet: 'I am warned in my sleepe to send you hence unto an island, where you shall be blessed with happiest successe, goe then and take this Cabinet with you, but open not the Boxe untill the adventure you shall see be ended, then open it, and remember me'.⁴¹ Veralinda embarks on her quest but she does not open the box before she is allowed to do so. What is even more striking is that she only opens it after her real identity has been revealed to her in an enchanted Theater: 'Then opened she the Cabinet wherein she found a writing in the Shepherds hand'.⁴² In this episode, Veralinda can be construed as an anti-Pandora, a woman whose measured, limited curiosity, allows her to resist the temptation of over-inquisitiveness. The cabinet or box becomes a superfluous, pointless tool, since the revelation has already occurred when the woman opens it.

38 The only occurrence of the word 'cabinet' which may evoke a cabinet of curiosities is a metaphorical one to express the excess of Liana's passion about to explode through language: 'When I had endured a little space (like a Cabinet so fild with treasure, as though not it selfe, yet the lock or hinges cannot containe it, but breake open): so did the lock of my speech flie abroad, to discover the treasure of my truth, and the infiniteness of his falsehood, not to be comprehended' (Book 2, 253). Interestingly, the cabinet's 'treasure' is not an accumulation of curious objects but an overflow of words which the woman is compelled to let out.

39 Andrea B., "Pamphilia's Cabinet: Gendered Authorship and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*", *English Literary History* 68, 2 (2001) 335–358.

40 The parallel with *Urania*'s quest of identity is obvious.

41 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 454.

42 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 456.

The author's refusal of morally bad, vain curiosity may be attributed to her attempted moral rehabilitation of feminine curiosity. This is borne out by the comparison between Lady Mary and Sir Philip Sidney's treatment of curiosity. Most of the occurrences of the terms in the *Arcadia* are either neutral or pejorative. For instance, when Philanax, in his letter to Basilius, condemns those who inquire into 'heavenly powers' and warns the latter against the bad curiosity of men which he associates with vanity:

I would then have said the heavenly powers to be revered, and not searched into, and their mercies rather by prayers to be sought, than their hidden counsels by curiosity. These kind of sooth-sayings (since they have left us in ourselves sufficient guides) to be nothing but fancy, wherein there must either be vanitie, or infalliblenes, and so either not to be respected, or not to be prevented.⁴³

In the *Arcadia*, Sidney sustains the idea that curiosity in on the whole useless. Whereas Sidney adopts a rather conventional stance condemning curiosity, Wroth, who resorts to the notion much more frequently, foregrounds the positive aspects of curiosity through moral as well as aesthetic rehabilitation. In *Urania*, as has already been suggested, by far the most numerous uses of 'curious' and its cognates are synonymous with 'beautiful', 'elaborate', 'skillfull', whether they apply to characters or to inanimate objects.

Even the minor protagonists we encounter, such as nymphs, shepherds, foresters, are described as reflecting an ideal of beauty and perfection. In Greece, Amphilantus and his friend Polarchos meet a nymph and a forester who embody reciprocal love and beauty, causing the two princes' admiration:

She was faire, and he lovely, being apparreld in greene made so neatly, and fit to him, as if he had been a Courtier, or one of those finer people had had his cloathes, might have been calld curious; his legges straight, and of the curioucest shape, were in white stockings, Garters he had none, his Hose being fastned above his knee; under his Girdle stuck his Arrowes, his Bow he held in his left hand [...] Shee was as curioslie proportioned, as all the Artists could set downe to make excellent.⁴⁴

43 Sidney Sir Philip, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* [1593], ed. M. Evans (London: 1977) 80.

44 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 3, 341–342.

Wroth stresses the couple's physical perfection thanks to the adjective 'curious', the superlative 'curiousest' and the adverb 'curiously'. Moreover, she links the man's beauty with the courtier's physical, outward perfection. Interestingly, she concludes the first part of her description, focused mainly on the couple's garments (i.e. their outside, their appearance), by referring to some imaginary artists' skillfulness: 'as all the Artists could set downe to make excellent'. More precisely the woman herself becomes the artists' masterpiece. Wroth transforms her into an archetype of beauty, a work of art. The same aesthetizing process seems to be at work in the numerous descriptions of monuments, i.e. the various instances of ekphrasis, which punctuate the romance. In most of the descriptions of temples, funeral monuments, fountains, gardens, one finds explicit references to 'curiosity'. In the description of the Throne of Love, Wroth even establishes a link between curiosity and artistic achievement: 'Comming towards it, they imagined it some Magicall work, for so daintily it appear'd in curiositie, as it seem'd as if it hung in the ayre, the Trees, Fountaines and all sweet delicacies being discerned through it'.⁴⁵ Here, curiosity is equated with a superior form of beauty and with the artist's craftsmanship: 'so daintily'. In this context, curiosity is synonymous with the celebration of art. Further in the romance, the notion of curiosity is recurrent in the ekphrasis of the castle where Dalinea (Parselius' second love after Urania) lives:

By that time the Messenger returnd: leading him first into a stately Hall, then up a faire paire of stone staires, carv'd curiously in Images of the Gods, and other rare workmanship: at the topp they came into a brave roome richly hang'd with hangings of Needle-worke, all in Silke and Gold, the Story being of *Paris* his Love, and rape of *Helen*; out of that they passed into another roome, not so big, but farre richer, the furniture being every way as sumptuous if not bettering it.⁴⁶

The adverb 'curiously' refers here both to the striking external appearance of the building and the manner, i.e. the skill, with which the monument is built. In the phrase 'and other rare workmanship', a judgment is passed on the quality of the craftsmanship and once again, the artist's cleverness or elaborateness is praised. The ekphrasis follows Parselius' progression inside the castle and the reader notices a *crescendo* as the Prince goes from 'a stately hall', to a 'brave room', to the second and final room, described as 'farre richer'. We reach the

45 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 48.

46 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 124.

climax of the ekphrasis when Parselius discovers Dalinea seated in the middle of the room:

[B]ut what made it indeed excell, was that, here was Dalinea sitting under a Cloth of Estate, of Carnation Velvet, curiously and richly set with Stones, all ouer being Embrodered with purle of Silver, and Gold, the Gold made in Sunnes, the Silver in Starres, Diamonds, Rubies, and other Stones plentifully and cunningly compassing them about, and plac'd as if for the Skye where they shin'd; but she standing appeard so much brighter, as if all that had been, but to set forth her light, so farre excelling them as the day wherein the Sunne doth shew most glorious, doth the drowsiest day.⁴⁷

The repetition of the verb 'excell', each time applied to Dalinea, as well as the comparative, 'so much brighter', show that the woman has become the focus of attention. The ekphrasis showcases the hyperbolic portrait of the woman as paramount object of curiosity. In this extract, both the woman and her castle are viewed as beautiful, curious objects; both are depicted as aesthetic ideals.

Wroth's recurrent references to the artist's elaborateness might reflect her own personal aesthetic ideal of meticulousness. We might suggest that her praise of craftsmanship and artistry probably testifies in turn to her own wish to be praised for her skillfulness and curiosity. While catering for her readership's taste for curious, i.e. strange, odd adventures, Wroth also capitalized on her readership's curiosity by writing a 'roman à clef'. She was working within a context in which female curiosity was largely condemned, yet she managed to attach to the notion of curiosity a moral ideal, that of meticulousness – even though she did not go as far as Madeleine de Scudéry who, a few decades later, moralized curiosity in order to instruct her readers through the alliance of pleasure and education.⁴⁸ In Wroth's *Urania* such curiosity, derived from meticulousness, becomes synonymous with artistic perfection. Wroth was not yet concerned with legitimizing female intellectual curiosity,⁴⁹ as Margaret Cavendish would be some forty years later, but she was indeed concerned with legitimizing her own curious, contrived and at times impenetrable style,⁵⁰ in order to achieve recognition as an author. She appears quite unique and

47 Wroth, *Urania*, Book 1, 124.

48 See Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand's chapter in this volume.

49 See Line Cottegnies' chapter on Margaret Cavendish in the present volume.

50 On Wroth's labyrinthine style in the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilantus*, see Moore M., "The Labyrinth as Style in *Pamphilia to Amphilantus*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38 (Winter 1998) 109–125.

original in her emphasis on curiosity as aesthetic perfection. Taking the risk of being branded a 'hermaphrodite',⁵¹ a curiosity to be ogled at a fair, Lady Mary Wroth is first and foremost curious about herself and her own artistic achievement.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Sidney Sir Philip, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* [1593], ed. M. Evans (London: 1977).
- Wroth Mary, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) ed. J.A. Roberts (Tempe: 2005).
- , *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. J.A. Roberts (Baton Rouge: 1977).
- , *The Second Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. A. Roberts – S. Gossett – J. Mueller, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Tempe: 1999).

Secondary Sources

- Andrea B., "Pamphilia's Cabinet: Gendered Authorship and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*", *English Literary History* 68, 2 (2001) 335–358.
- Brennan, M.G., "Creating Female Authorship in the Early Seventeenth Century: Ben Jonson and Lady Mary Wroth", in Justice G.L. – Tinker N. (eds.), *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550–1800* (Cambridge: 2002) 73–93.
- Fienberg N., "Mary Wroth's Poetics of the Self", *Studies in English Literature* 42 (Winter 2002) 121–136.
- , "Mary Wroth and the Invention of Female Poetic Subjectivity", in Miller N. – Waller G. (eds.), *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England* (Knoxville: 1991) 175–190.
- Hackett H., "'A book, and solitariness': Melancholia, Gender and Literary Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's *Urania*", in McMullan G. (ed.) *Renaissance Configurations: Voices / Bodies / Spaces, 1580–1690* (London: 2001) 64–85.
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).
- , *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998).

51 'Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster / As by thy words and works all men may con-ster', Lord Denny's letter is reproduced in Josephine A. Roberts, *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* (Baton Rouge: 1983) 32.

- Lentsch-Griffin A., "L'*Urania* de Lady Mary Wroth (1587?–1651?): une poétique de la mélancolie", Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, 2013 (unpublished Ph.D.).
- Miller N.J., " 'Not much to be marked': Narrative of the Woman's Part in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 29 (Winter 1989) 121–137.
- Moore M., "The Labyrinth as Style in *Pamphilia to Amphilantus*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38 (Winter 1998) 109–125.
- Quilligan M., "The Constant Subject: Instability and Female Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems", in Harvey E.D. – Eisaman Maus K. (eds.), *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Chicago – London: 1990) 307–335.
- Salzman P., "Mary Wroth: From Obscurity to Canonization", in *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: 2006).
- Smith R., "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilantus*: The Politics of Withdrawal", *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (September 2000) 408–431.
- Waller G., *The Sidney Family Romance* (Detroit: 1993).

Margaret Cavendish or the Curious Reader

Line Cottage

As has been amply shown in the other essays in this volume, the history of curiosity in the early modern period was also a gendered one. It has been suggested, in particular by Neil Kenny and Barbara Benedict,¹ that the changing status of curiosity led to an even stronger suspicion concerning female curiosity, an assertion that this book has sought to question and document. This context necessarily affected women intellectuals and authors, who found strategies to avoid and transcend the rampant condemnation of female curiosity. It is well-known that Mary Wroth was notoriously accused of being a ‘Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster’ around 1621 by Edward Denny for publishing a romance, *Urania*, thus trespassing on male territory.² At the end of the century, Mary Astell still deplored the fact that learned women were treated as monsters.³ Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, would later remember this when she herself turned to publication as a means of self-expression. In the preface to *Sociable Letters*, she wards off possible criticism, alluding to Denny’s famous libellous epistle: ‘It may be said to me, as one said to a Lady, *Work, Lady, Work, let writing Books alone, For surely Wiser Women ne’r writ one* [...]’.⁴ In fact, Margaret Cavendish offers a wonderful case study for the topic of female curiosity in its multifarious aspects. An intensely curious mind herself, she is the perfect embodiment of the spirit of the ‘age of curiosity’,⁵ publishing widely on a host of subjects while becoming herself an object of curiosity for her contemporaries. Yet her attitude towards curiosity and

-
- 1 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 384–385; Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001) 118. See Introduction, above.
 - 2 Quoted in Hannay M.P., *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Burlington: 2010) 235. Denny thought he had recognized himself and his family in Wroth’s romance *Urania* (London, John Marriott and Iohn Grismand: 1621), which caused his ire.
 - 3 Astell Mary, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* [1700], in *Political Writings*, ed. P. Springborg (Cambridge: 1996) 28.
 - 4 Cavendish Margaret, *Sociable Letters* [1664], ed. J. Fitzmaurice (Peterborough, Ontario: 2004) 38.
 - 5 Evans R.J.W. – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: 2006) 9.

curiosities is extremely complex. It is in fact through a critique of the less noble form of curiosity, which she associates with the vanity of collecting and accumulating curiosities that she formulates one of the first, and most lucid, contemporary critiques of the experimental practice at the Royal Society. She moreover shows a clear consciousness of the gendered aspect of the question of curiosity, as shown by her militant attitude towards scientific enquiry.

All of Cavendish's works about natural philosophy reflect her wide-ranging curiosity for natural phenomena, as well as for the philosophy of her day. Her works often read, in fact, like the books of curiosities, or secrets, which William Eamon has so magisterially studied.⁶ Her essays on natural philosophy present themselves as a series of disconnected questions, presented unsystematically, which she seems to be asking herself one after the other. In this she shows her engagement with the culture of curiosity which has been variously documented by such historians as H. Blumenberg, K. Pomian, L. Daston and K. Park, and more recently by both N. Kenny and B. Benedict, a culture which combined wonder for natural phenomena and artefacts and forms of pre-scientific inquiry.⁷ The Royal Society's fascination with monsters and 'curiosities' of all kinds has thus been described as reconfiguring the relationship to both knowledge and nature, revitalizing interest in nature's secrets.⁸ Cavendish's contemporary Robert Hooke, Curator of experiments at the Royal Society, claims for instance to 'gratify the curious Reader with some things more remov'd beyond our reach hitherto',⁹ with his beautifully-illustrated *Micrographia*, a best-selling volume which is highly emblematic of the epistemological moment. Hooke constantly emphasizes the beauty and perfection of nature, in one word, the 'curious order' (89) of natural creation, which is equally a source of pleasure and of knowledge: 'The order, variety, and curiosity in the shape of this little seed, makes it a very pleasant object for the *Microscope*' (156). Margaret Cavendish shares this wonder at the ingenuity and perfection of the natural world, and also repeatedly emphasizes the variety and curiosity

6 Eamon W., *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: 1994). This apparently unsystematic, accumulative approach to scientific issues was shared by Francis Bacon in *Sylva Sylvarum* (London, William Rawley: 1627), and should not be interpreted in negative terms.

7 Cf. Blumenberg H., "The Trial of Theoretical Curiosity", in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. M. Wallace (Cambridge: 1983) 229–453; Pomian K., *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500–1800*, trans. E. Wiles-Porter (London: 1990); Daston L. – Park K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: 1998) 303–328. For Kenny and Benedict, see note 1, and introduction, *supra*.

8 Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* 301.

9 Hooke Robert, *Micrographia* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1665) 67.

of nature: 'there is more variety and curiosity in corporeal motions, then any one single Creature can imagine', she claims in *Philosophical Letters*.¹⁰ In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, Anne Maxwell: 1666), a scientific work which was much influenced by Hooke's *Micrographia* as is obvious from Cavendish's several allusions to his famous iconography, she celebrates the infinite curiosity of forms and shapes. The treatise reflects her seemingly inexhaustible curiosity for the phenomena of the physical world: essays are loosely juxtaposed like items in a cabinet of curiosity, or secrets in the highly popular books of secrets, rather than being tightly organized according to logical principles – after the eyes of the fly and the snail come for instance the seeds of vegetable, the nature of water, the colour of charcoal, a study of the phenomenon of frost, the telescope, but also observations on the senses and on perception in general, etc. In her romance, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (London, A. Maxwell: 1666), which was originally published as a companion piece to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*,¹¹ she imagines a new kind of Baconian House of Salomon to fulfill this all-encompassing curiosity: her heroine, the Empress of the Blazing World, thus creates various societies of natural philosophers (incidentally called 'vertuosos'),¹² who are then sent on different missions to enquire into the several realms of nature, according to their special talents: the worm-men are to explore the entrails of the earth, the bird-men explore the air and observe the planets, etc.

This all-encompassing (if not exhaustive) curiosity about the natural world is echoed in Cavendish's equally unsystematic exploration of literary genres, which she 'covers' one after the other: poetry, fiction, orations, philosophical treatises, biography, drama, etc. She never commented on her intentions for doing so, but this can be interpreted as an attempt to produce a fairly exhaustive *œuvre*.¹³ It is clear that no domain of intellectual pursuit was to remain closed to her. Cavendish comments several times on the importance of curiosity as a noble drive. In "An Epistle to the Reader" in *Natures Pictures* (London,

10 Cavendish Margaret, *Philosophical Letters* (London, s. n.: 1664) 166.

11 A few copies were also published separately. See Cottagnies L., "Appendix. A Bibliographic Note: Cyrano de Bergerac's *Estats et Empires de la Lune* and Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*", in Siegfried B.R. – Sarasohn L.T. (eds.), *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (London – New York: 2014) 209–215, in particular 210.

12 Cavendish Margaret, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. K. Lilley (London: 1994) 136.

13 Cf. Cottagnies L. – Weitz N. (eds.), "Introduction", *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison, Teaneck: 2003) 7–17.

J. Martin and J. Allestrye: 1656), she celebrates both the study of nature and curiosity as uplifting experiences of an almost mystical kind, which elevate and improve the spirit, and also cause delight and pleasure:

[A]bove all, this study is a great delight, and pleases the curiosity of mens minds, it carries their thoughts above vulgar and common Objects, it elevates their spirits to an aspiring pitch; It gives room to the untired appetites of man, to walk or run in, for so spacious it is, that it is beyond the compasse of time; besides, it gives pleasure in varieties [...].¹⁴

Curiosity is in fact what distinguishes humans from other living beings, as she had already pointed out in *Poems, and Fancies* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1653):

Desire, and Curiosity make a Man to be above other Creatures: for by desiring Knowledge, Man is as much above a Beast, as want of perfect Knowledge makes him lesse then God, as he hath a transcending Soule to out-live the World to all Eternity; so he hath a transcending desire to live in the Worlds Memory.¹⁵

Curiosity is described here as pleasurable and as having to do with a desire of immortality or fame: for her curiosity and the desire of immortality proceed from the same impulse. This conception of curiosity as a specifically human trait, which sets him apart from animals, is a direct echo of Hobbes, who, in *Leviathan* (1651), made of curiosity a passion specific to man. But for Hobbes, curiosity was in fact a deeply ambivalent passion, a 'lust of the mind', the cause of much unquiet:

Desire, to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but Man; so that Man is distinguished, not onely by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other Animals; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of Sense, by praedominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a Lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continuall and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnall Pleasure.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cavendish, *Natures Pictures* 10.

¹⁵ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* 52.

¹⁶ Hobbes Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: 1982) 124.

For him, because curiosity is virtually inexhaustible, it is responsible for a form of anxiety about the future, but it is also what makes man a rational being (and consequently a religious one).¹⁷ Cavendish is aware that melancholy is a side effect of curiosity: for her too, curiosity is what makes man perfectible, but this very perfectibility causes unrest. In a poem published in *Poems, and Fancies*, Cavendish stages a dialogue between a man and an oak. Answering the oak, the man comments upon the misery that goes together with a thirst for knowledge which is by definition inextinguishable because the quest can never be exhaustive:

Alas, poore Oake, thou understandst, nor can
 Imagine halfe the misery of Man.
 All other Creatures onely in Sense joyne,
 But Man hath something more, which is divine.
 He hath a Mind, doth to the Heavens aspire,
 A Curiosity for to inquire:
 A Wit that nimble is, which runs about
 In every Corner, to seeke Nature out.
 For She doth hide her selfe, as fear'd to shew
 Man all her workes, least he too powerfull grow.
 [...]
 And what creates desire in Mans Breast,
 A Nature is divine, which seekes the best:
 And never can be satisfied, untill
 He, like a God, doth in Perfection dwell.¹⁸

Cavendish is obviously aware here of the ambivalent nature of curiosity, a divine gift which allows man to pierce the secrets of nature, but also causes his 'misery'.

In *The Blazing World*, the Empress, Cavendish's heroine and mirror image, is allowed to freely wonder about the location of Paradise and the nature of

17 Y.-C. Zarka also shows that it is curiosity which is at the heart of religion: 'Curiosity, or love of the knowledge of causes, draws a man from consideration of the effect, to seek the cause; and again, the cause of that cause; till of necessity he must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall; which is it men call God' (167). See Zarka Y.-C., "La curiosité chez Hobbes", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) t. 1, 157–166.

18 Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* 70.

spirits, yet elsewhere in her *oeuvre* Cavendish associates excessive curiosity in matters of faith with angst and even downright impiety, as in *Natures Pictures* for instance, in a poem entitled “An Expression of the Doubts and Curiosity of Man’s Mind” (111). In this poem, a man inquires about the nature and fate of souls, and is duly warned against going too far in this line of inquiry. In a tale published in the same collection, Cavendish introduces a man who is so curious about the universe that he decides to go and consult a witch, so she can help him travel to the moon or the sun, and even to Hell – a clear parable, here, intimating that even ‘good’, positive forms of curiosity can easily turn into their opposites, in a Faustus-like bind, and that one of the meanings of the word ‘curious’ had to do with witchcraft: ‘THERE was a Man went to a Witch, whom he entreated to aid his Desires: for, said he, I have a curiosity to travel; but I would go into such Countreys, which, without your power to assist me, I cannot do’. (249) The witch declines, however, and takes him to the centre of the earth instead (which is specifically described as not being a version of Hell), where they meet an old man, who runs a forge there, and accepts to inform the extreme enquirer:

[B]eing near the old Man, the Witch excused her coming, and prayed him not to be offended with them: for, there was a Man desired Knowledge, and would not spare any pains or industry to obtain it: For which he praised the Man, and said, He was welcome; and any thing he could inform him of, he would. (254)

The dialogue that follows clearly anticipates the dialogues between the Empress and the spirits in *The Blazing World*, which was written ten years later: here in *Poems, and Fancies* the traveller interviews his informant, who offers him fanciful answers about such physical questions as the origins of heat or of the circulation of water at the centre of the earth. Beyond the playfulness inherent in the genre of the tale, it is possible to take this questionable (yet candid) traveller as representing the natural philosopher, while the presence of the (oxymoronic) figure of this oddly harmless witch suggests Cavendish’s ambivalent disregard of the moral implications of ‘bad’ curiosity – an indication perhaps of her awareness of the aporia posed by curiosity, both good *and* bad inextricably bound as in a Möbius strip.

This awareness of Cavendish’s runs contrary to Hobbes’ amoral view of curiosity (or of any passion for that matter). It also somewhat complicates the neat, bipolar narrative about the rehabilitation of ‘good’ curiosity in the seventeenth century by Bacon and his followers and the corresponding criminalization of

bad curiosity.¹⁹ In fact, Cavendish was obviously very much influenced also by Bacon's emphasis on the need to morally regulate curiosity, in particular by foregrounding its usefulness. This led her to express one of the earliest, and most pertinent, critiques of experimentalism as practised at the Royal Society, by suggesting that it had more to do with the collecting and exhibiting of curiosities than with true scientific inquiry. In several of her writings, Cavendish expressed her dislike of curiosities and in particular cabinets of curiosities. In 1594 Bacon had called for the constitution of 'a goodly, huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion [...] whatsoever singularity, chance and the shuffle of things has produced; whatsoever Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included'.²⁰ Yet, thirty years later, in *The New Atlantis*, he also forbid the use of scientific advances and technologies for show and entertainment.

Margaret Cavendish never possessed her own cabinet, although it seems that her husband William had one, which was dispersed when the civil war broke out,²¹ not even a collection of *naturalia*, which could have been justified by her interest in natural philosophy. In a praise poem first published in 1666, which might have been meant as a compliment on one of the frontispieces used by Cavendish and which represented her in front of an empty library,²² Richard Flecknoe even specifically praised her for having an empty *closet* (although a closet is not exactly similar to a cabinet), which he sees as an emblem of her pure dedication to intellectual pursuits :

19 See introduction, *supra*.

20 Quoted in Impey O. – Macgregor A. (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: 1985) 1.

21 This she mentions in her *Life of William Cavendish* (London, A. Maxwell: 1667), as 'several Curiosities of Cabinets, Cups, and other things, which after My Lord was gone out of England, were taken out of his Manor house, Welbeck' (67).

22 Frontispieces were not integral parts of the books, and this particular one appears in different editions. It is used, for instance, to illustrate *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1655) in the presentation copy of her collected works, presented to Leiden University in 1658 by Constantijn Huygens, but it is published in the Huntington copy of *The Worlds Olio* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1655). See Taylor-Pearce D., "Portraits of Melancholy – 111. Cavendish's 'Studious She is and all Alone' frontispiece, 1655", *The she-philosopher.com website*. URL: <http://www.she-philosopher.com/gallery/melancholyP3.html> (accessed 12 August 2015).

What place is this! looks like some sacred Cell,
 Where Holy *Hermits* antiently did dwell,
 [...]
 Is this a *Lady-Closet*! 't cannot be,
 For nothing here of *vanity* you see;
 Nothing of *curiosity*, nor *pride*,
 As all your *Ladyes Closets* have beside.²³

A typically misogynistic note, curiosity here means over-niceness of apparel. In a tale published in *The Worlds Olio*, when Cavendish drafts rules and regulations for an imaginary, perfect commonwealth governed by a wise king, she specifies that he should have no cabinet, filled with 'useless curiosities', but a library instead, which could benefit his whole kingdom:

Item. This Royal Ruler to have none of those they call their Cabinets, which is a Room filled with all useless curiosities, which seem Effeminate, and is so Expensive, bestowing infinite Sums, almost to the impoverishing of a Kingdome, only to fill a Room with little cut, carved Statues, and Models of Stones and Medals; as also divers Toyes made of Amber, Cornelion, Agats, Chrystals, and divers sorts of Shels, and the like; which Room might be better employed, and to more use, in placing Famous and Learned Authors Works, as a Library, which the whole Kingdome may draw Knowledge and Understanding from, and the Money employed to more famous Curiosities than Shels, or the like, As in stately Monuments, which shews a Kingdome in a Flourishing Condition [...]. (207)

Of course, this rejection might seem somewhat paradoxical, since her own writings could be considered as a form of dematerialized cabinet of curiosities: the paratactic nature of her style of writing, which tends to juxtapose fragments, forming, to use one of her favourite culinary metaphors, an 'olio' or a 'hodge podge', could be analyzed along those lines. Marjorie Swann has for instance described Jonson's *Works* (London, printed by William Stansby: 1616) and even Herrick's collection of poems, *Hesperides* (London, John Williams and Francis Eglesfield: 1648) as cabinets of curiosity, and interprets

23 Flecknoe Richard, *A Farrago of Several Pieces Being a Supplement to His Poems, Characters, Heroick Pourtraits, Letters, and Other Discourses Formerly Published by Him* (London, Printed for the author: 1666) 13. The poem was reprinted in *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Dutchess of Newcastle* (London, Thomas Newcombe: 1678) 158.

them as instruments of textual self-fashioning – just as material cabinets of curiosity were instruments of social self-fashioning.²⁴ This reading could certainly be extended to Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies, Natures Pictures*, and perhaps even to *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. However, the paradox is only apparent: as the repetition of the word 'use' in the quotation above indicates, Cavendish first and foremost objected to the uselessness of curiosities, when a library open to the public might be more profitable – again a Baconian argument.

By 1666, which was the date of the first publication of both *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* and *The Blazing World*, Cavendish had had time to reflect on the method that lay at the basis of the accumulation of knowledge at the Royal Society, in particular in the famous Repository. Both works show her awareness both of the Baconian agenda of the Royal Society, and of what she saw as the disappointingly partial enforcement of this programme. It is perhaps in *The Blazing World* that she is most vocal in her critique, first when she dismisses her bear-men, who are 'her experimental philosophers' in the fiction, because they admit to using their optical instruments for pleasure rather than for use: 'we take more delights in artificial delusions, than in natural truths'.²⁵ She therefore commands them to destroy their optical devices. Then satirizing some of the experiments after which Hooke produced the famous, beautiful engravings of *Micrographia* (the eye of the fly, the piece of charcoal, the flea, etc.), she offers a hilarious account of other kinds of similar 'experiments', which are shown to be increasingly absurd in the romance, such as the observation of a whale through a telescope, or of a vacuum through a microscope, etc.²⁶ The critique is well-known, and it is extremely funny.²⁷ In contrast to most of the Empress's experimenters in the romance, her anatomists seem to have it right, however, and they even correct the Empress when she asks them to dissect 'monsters':

24 Swann M., *Curiosities and Texts. The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: 2001) 149–193.

25 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 142.

26 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 145.

27 See for instance Hutton S., "Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Descriptions of a New World, Called The Blazing World*", in Cottegnies – Weitz (eds.), *Authorial Conquests* 161–178 and Parageau S., "La satire des sciences dans *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* et *The Blazing World* (1666) de Margaret Cavendish", *Études Épistémè* 10 (2006) 75–97. URL: <http://revue.etudes-episteme.org/?la-satire-des-sciences-dans> (accessed 12 August 2015).

Then the Empress commanded her anatomists to dissect such kinds of creatures as are called monsters. But they answered her Majesty, that it would be but an unprofitable and useless work, and hinder their better employments; for when we dissect dead animals, said they, it is for no other end, but to observe what defects or distempers they had, that we may cure the like in living ones, so that all our care and industry concerns only the preservation of mankind; but we hope your Majesty will not preserve monsters, which are most commonly destroyed, except it be for novelty; neither will the dissection of monsters prevent the errors of nature's irregular actions; for by dissecting some, we cannot prevent the production of others; so that our pains and labours will be to no purpose, unless to satisfy the vain curiosities of inquisitive men. (*The Blazing World* 158–159)

This passage reads in fact like a pithy critique of the culture of curiosities that had taken hold of the Royal Society – and English society at large, as shown by the contemporary craze for sensational raree-shows and exhibitions of monsters and oddities. The minutes of the Royal Society meetings kept in the Journal Books show that not only were experiments exhibited in public (they were usually re-enacted, in fact), but also that curiosities were regularly displayed and discussed for the greatest pleasure of the attending members and visitors. According to Fontes da Costa, '[t]he natural curiosities displayed included monstrous specimens, different kinds of anatomical preparations, petrified specimens, concretions, figured stones, exotic animals and plants, minerals, fossils, shells and corals' – all directly out of cabinets of curiosities, and probably meant to join the Society's repository directly after the sessions.²⁸ There would also, of course, be occasional dissections of specimens. Through her biting satire, Cavendish clearly objects to the vanity and the morbid, scopic fascination such practices revealed. Her own anatomists in the romance reassign dissection where it belongs, i.e. to the discipline of medicine: according to them, dissection should indeed be used to cure, not to obscenely exhibit the flukes of nature. Cavendish does not seem to be aware of other uses of dissection, as in the training of physicians and surgeons, for instance, but her satirical perspective shows that for her the Royal Society had somehow betrayed its original Baconian ideal.

28 Fontes da Costa P., "The Culture of Curiosity at The Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century", *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56.2 (May 2002) 147–166.

Finally, Margaret Cavendish also reveals a clear consciousness of the gendered aspect of the history of curiosity.²⁹ By publishing her own works, and by aiming at contributing to the contemporary debates on natural philosophy, she became the butt of satire, a curiosity herself, and early in her writing career even had to face aspersions of plagiarism. In *Natures Pictures*, her husband, William Cavendish wrote a prefatory poem to defend 'his Duchess', because he was conscious that she was encroaching upon male territory by writing and publishing books:

O, but a Woman writes them! She does strive
T'intrench too much on Man's Prerogative.
Then that's the Crime, that her Fame pulls yours down.
If you be Scholars, she's too of the Gown;
Therefore be civil to her: think it fit
She should not be condemn'd cause she's a Wit. (*Natures Pictures* 2–3)

Curiosity, like wit, has no sex, William Cavendish seems to suggest. Meanwhile, Cavendish often deplors the poor education offered to women in numerous prefaces, repeatedly calling for a reform, although she is acutely aware of the lack of female support among her readers. She famously adds that for

the good encouragement of our sex, lest in time we should grow irrational as idiots, by the dejectedness of our spirits, through the careless neglects and despisements of the masculine sex to the female, thinking it impossible we should have either learning or wit or judgment, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of dejectedness think so too, which makes us quit all industry towards profitable knowledge, being employed only in low and petty employments, which take away not only our Abilities towards arts, but higher capacities in speculations, so we are become like worms, that only live in the dull earth of ignorance, winding our selves sometimes out by the help of some refreshing rain of good education, which seldom is given us, for we are kept like birds in cages, to hop up and down in our houses [...].³⁰

29 See Introduction, *supra*.

30 Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* sig. Bz.

Yet, in spite of adversity, Cavendish's rationalist, Cartesian conviction that the mind has no sex remained unchanged. In the best of worlds, it was her belief that curiosity should be allowed to women as it was to men. In one of her 1662 plays entitled *The Unnatural Tragedy*, a group of young women complain about their lack of education; one of them imagines a utopian social order, in which the men would be attributed 'all Arts of Labour', and the women 'all Arts of Curiosity'. 'We are not Fools, we are capable of Knowledge, we only want Experience and Education, to make us as wise as men', cries one of them.³¹ Labour vs. Curiosity: this new gendered division of labour (physical vs. intellectual) and of knowledge (male and concrete vs. female and abstract) offers a wonderful emblem for an imaginative rehabilitation of female curiosity.

In *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic*, Katie Whitaker provides an astute description of the reception of Cavendish by her contemporaries.³² She shows how the myth of the 'mad Madge' – a phrase which only appeared, in fact, in the nineteenth century – was gradually built, and that we should qualify the picture of a Cavendish ignored by the intellectuals of her time, which is still, more often than not, the official story, even among many Cavendish scholars. But it is possible, however, to see how she paradoxically responded to her contemporaries' taste for scandal by consciously and deliberately fashioning herself into an object of curiosity, adopting a public persona that flouted the desire for 'singularity' that she had defined as a character trait in her 1656 autobiographical fragment.³³ Cavendish was thus content to attract crowds of curious gazers on each of her outings in London, by wearing extravagant costumes: she was sighted wearing a man's vest over a long skirt – the very hermaphrodite of Denny's satire on Mary Wroth – with unusual colour schemes, all her servants dressed in black and white. In a word, she turned her curiosity status into that of a celebrity, as each of her public appearances became a carefully controlled show, not unlike her Empress's apparitions in *The Blazing World*, when the latter stages herself in pyrotechnic shows designed to impress her subjects and enemies into awe and obedience.³⁴

31 Cavendish Margaret, *The Unnatural Tragedy*, in *Plays* (London, John Martyn, James Allestrye, and Thomas Dicas: 1662) 332.

32 Whitaker K., *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London, 2004).

33 Cavendish, *Natures Pictures* 387.

34 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 211 and 215.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anon., *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Dutchess of Newcastle* (London, Thomas Newcombe: 1678).
- Astell Mary, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* [1706], in *Political Writings*, ed. P. Springborg (Cambridge: 1996).
- Bacon Francis, *Sylva Sylvarum* (London, William Rawley: 1627).
- Cavendish Margaret, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. K. Lilley (London: 1994).
- , *Life of William Cavendish* (London, Anne Maxwell: 1667).
- , *Natures Pictures* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1656).
- , *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, Anne Maxwell: 1666).
- , *Philosophical Letters* (London, s. n.: 1664).
- , *Plays* (London, J. Martyn, James Allestrye, and Thomas Dicas: 1662).
- , *Poems, and Fancies* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1653).
- , *Sociable Letters* [1664], ed. J. Fitzmaurice (Peterborough, Ont.: 2004).
- , *The Worlds Olio* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1655).
- Flecknoe Richard, *A Farrago of Several Pieces Being a Supplement to His Poems, Characters, Heroick Pourtraits, Letters, and Other Discourses Formerly Published by Him* (London, Printed for the author: 1666).
- Hobbes Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: 1982).
- Hooke Robert, *Micrographia* (London, John Martin and James Allestrye: 1665).
- Wroth Mary, *Urania* (London, John Marriott and Iohn Grismand: 1621).

Secondary Sources

- Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: a Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001).
- Blumenberg H., "The Trial of Theoretical Curiosity", in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. M. Wallace (Cambridge: 1983) 229–453.
- Cottagnies L., "Appendix. A Bibliographic Note: Cyrano de Bergerac's *Estats et Empires de la Lune* and Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*", in Siegfried B.R. – Sarasohn L.T. (eds.), *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (London – New York: 2014) 209–215.
- Cottagnies L. – Weitz N. (eds.), "Introduction", *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison, Teaneck: 2003) 7–17.
- Daston L. – Park K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature 150–1750* (New York: 1998).
- Eamon W., *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: 1994).
- Evans R.J.W. – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: 2006).

- Fontes da Costa P., "The Culture of Curiosity at the Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century", *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56.2 (May 2002) 147–166.
- Hannay M.P., *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Burlington: 2010).
- Hutton S., "Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Descriptions of a New World, Called The Blazing World*", in Cottegnies L. – Weitz N. (eds.), *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison, Teaneck: 2003) 161–178.
- Impey O. – Macgregor A. (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: 1985).
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).
- Pomian K., *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500–1800*, trans. E. Wiles-Porter (London: 1990).
- Parageau S., "La satire des sciences dans *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* et *The Blazing World* (1666) de Margaret Cavendish", *Études Épistémè* 10 (2006) 75–97. URL: <http://revue.etudes-episteme.org/?la-satire-des-sciences-dans> (accessed 12 August 2015).
- Swann M., *Curiosities and Texts. The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: 2001) 149–193.
- Taylor-Pearce D., "Portraits of Melancholy – III. Cavendish's 'Studious She is and all Alone' frontispiece, 1655", *The she-philosopher.com website*. URL: <http://www.she-philosopher.com/gallery/melancholyP3.html> (accessed 12 August 2015).
- Whitaker K., *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: 2004).
- Zarka Y.-C., "La curiosité chez Hobbes", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) 2 t., t. 1, 157–166.

On the Proper Use of Curiosity: Madeleine de Scudéry's *Célinte*

Marie-Gabrielle Lallemand

(trans. Matthew Hylands)

In 1661 Madeleine de Scudéry had abandoned long novels.¹ She continued her career with a series of novellas,² until in the final phase of her literary work she appeared no longer as a novelist but as a moralist, publishing collections of conversations.³ From her first novel onwards, however, she had built into her stories the moral conversations that became ever more important as her work progressed.⁴ In keeping with novelistic decorum, these conversations are often about love – but not always, far from it in fact. Beginning with the last volumes of *Artamène*, then more so in *Clélie* and the novellas that follow, conversations on society manners and the rules governing them proliferate. Among these is the conversation on curiosity that will interest us here. It occupies the opening pages of *Célinte*, the first of Madeleine de Scudéry's novellas.

For Madeleine de Scudéry, then, the passage from the novel to the novella – that is, from writing works of fiction to works of a more complex status, half fictional, half factual – coincides with a period of reflection on the idea of curiosity. She is one of those writers – ever more numerous as the seventeenth century goes on – who live by their pen and therefore are strictly bound to satisfy their readership and to find patrons willing to fund them. In the course of the seventeenth century a new audience attracted to her works emerged, no longer men of letters but a society audience and to a large extent female. The curiosity of this new audience is among the most important of the paradigms

1 *Ibrahim* (1641), *Artamène ou le grand Cyrus* (1649–1653), *Clélie* (1654–1660). Neither the latter novel nor any other of the author's works after 1660 was written in collaboration with her brother.

2 *Célinte* (1661), *Mathilde* (1667), *La Promenade de Versailles* (1669).

3 *Conversations sur divers sujets* (Paris, C. Barbin: 1680); *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets* (Paris, C. Barbin: 1684); *La Morale du monde* (Paris, T. Guillaing: 1686); *Conversations de morale* (Paris, Vve S. Mabre-Cramoisy: 1688); *Entretiens de morale* (Paris, J. Anisson: 1692).

4 See in particular the works of Delphine Denis on this subject: *La Muse galante. Poétique de la conversation dans l'Œuvre de Madeleine de Scudéry* (Paris: 1997) and *De l'air galant et autres conversations, 1653–1684. Pour une étude de l'archive galante* (Paris: 1998).

Madeleine de Scudéry considered in her particular reflection on the implicit purpose of literature: to please and instruct [*plaire et instruire*].

Célinde opens with a conversation on curiosity⁵ taking place in the Bois de Vincennes a few days after the triumphal entry into Paris of Louis XIV and his wife Maria-Theresa on August 26, 1660. Taking part in the conversation along with the un-named female narrator⁶ are two women, Lysimène and Artelice, and four men, Mériante, Philinte, Cléarque and Cléandre. This conversation, which includes an account of the king's and queen's entry into Paris, is followed by a 'novella', a brief story of the amorous adventures of the eponymous heroine and Poliante. Once the story is finished the speakers resume their conversation, commenting on what they have just heard.

The theme of curiosity binds together the various elements of this novella. The queen's entry is described in the first place because Lysimène asks Mériante whether he is glad he was curious enough to see the festivities. As for the story read aloud, the character who undertakes to do so for her friends introduces it as follows:

'I assure you', said Artelice, 'that whatever may be said of curiosity, I shall not be cured of it easily. Even as I speak, I long more than anything in the world to read a novella that was given to me an hour before I left Paris, because I was promised that it is an adventure in which several real events are described with the names changed. I have the greatest curiosity to discover whether I can guess them; all the more so', she added, 'because I was told that curiosity plays some part in the final event of this history'.⁷

5 This conversation is reported by the narrator, the speakers having asked her to put their words in writing.

6 A gendered past participle reveals to the reader that the narrator is a woman. See the note on page 5 of the A. Niderst edition to which we refer here: *Célinde, nouvelle première* (Paris: 1979). The translations in passages cited are those of the translator of the present essay. No complete English translation of *Célinde* has been published.

7 'Je vous assure, dit Artelice, que quoi qu'on puisse dire de la curiosité, je ne m'en guérirai pas aisément et, de l'heure que je parle, j'ai la plus grande envie du monde de lire une nouvelle que l'on m'a donnée une heure avant que de partir de Paris car, comme on m'a assuré que c'est une aventure qui a plusieurs événements véritables et qu'on a écrite sous des noms supposés, j'ai la plus grande curiosité qu'on puisse avoir de voir si je pourrai deviner qui c'est et j'en ai d'autant plus d'envie, ajouta-t-elle que la curiosité, à ce qu'on m'a dit, a quelque part au dernier événement de cette Histoire' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 57). All translations from the French are the translator's own.

Sources of the Conversation on Curiosity

Madeleine de Scudéry draws on the *Morals* of Plutarch as a source for her characters' opinions.⁸ Plutarch's conception of curiosity is wholly negative: he sees it as 'a desire to learn of the misfortunes of others, a disease free neither of envy nor of malice'.⁹ Instead of prying into others' failings it would be better to know one's own, but people can rarely bear to see themselves as they are, so they give themselves up to the critical observation of others' vices. Therefore Plutarch sets out to convert curiosity, to give it such 'honest and agreeable' objects¹⁰ as the knowledge of heaven and earth, or of plants. And if nothing but vice can interest the curious, let them devote themselves to history, which offers abundant examples of every sort of depravity. Thus Plutarch calls for an effort to learn not to be curious: to adopt the habit of resisting this sordid tendency that exists in everyone but can be overcome with a self-mastery acquired through self-discipline.

Curiosity is not condemned as firmly in *Célinthe* as in Plutarch's treatise. For Madeleine de Scudéry as for La Mothe Le Vayer, curiosity is 'no evil at all in itself, but only in excess'.¹¹ Therefore, given that 'all the best things have limits, these should be prescribed in this case as in others':¹² it is a matter of regulating curiosity. Madeleine de Scudéry effectively returns in 1661 to the argument of the treatise published by La Mothe Le Vayer in 1648.¹³ Their conception of curiosity is that recorded at the end of the century (1690) in the *Dictionary* of Furetière with this definition: 'Desire, passion to see and learn new things,

8 This is not the author's first use of Plutarch, who serves as a source for the reflection on friendship that runs throughout her work.

9 'un certain désir d'apprendre ce qui va mal chez autrui, maladie qui n'est exempte ni d'envie ni de malignité', Plutarque (Plutarch), *Œuvres morales*, ed. J. Dumortier – J. Defradas (Paris: 1975) Book 7, 266.

10 'honnêtes et agréables', Plutarque (Plutarch), *Œuvres morales* 271.

11 'une chose qui n'est nullement mauvaise en elle-même mais seulement en ses excès', La Mothe le Vayer F., *Petits traités en forme de lettres écrites à diverses personnes* (Paris, A. Courbé: 1648), Letter xvi, 'De la curiosité' 181. For a history of curiosity, see Blumenberg H., *La Légitimité des temps modernes* (Paris: 1999) (*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966), particularly the third part 257–516.

12 'les meilleures choses ont toujours des limites, il faut en prescrire à celle-ci aussi bien qu'aux autres', La Mothe le Vayer, *Petits traités en forme de lettres* 182.

13 The appropriation is acknowledged: the treatise of 'wise Cléanthe' is mentioned on page 50. La Mothe Le Vayer appears under this name in the fifth part of *Clélie*.

rare and curious secrets. There is a good curiosity and a bad'.¹⁴ So the speakers of *Célinte* can all, to varying degrees, be both curious and honest people: they embody the good curiosity, or at least an inoffensive curiosity. The bad examples are provided by certain of their contemporaries, both men and women. Mériante, the least curious of the speakers, declares himself hostile only to that curiosity which is 'vain, useless and so often extravagant, found in men's minds and women's'.¹⁵ Bad curiosity, then, is not something peculiar to the weaker sex, or so it would seem on reading the first part of the conversation. Closer scrutiny is called for here, however.

Masculine and Feminine Curiosity

Given that everyone – whether man or woman – is curious, curiosity ought to be turned to positive ends. On this point a greater difference predictably arises. Men are busy 'penetrating [...] the secrets of nature, or of all the sciences and arts'.¹⁶ Women, being 'little suited' to such secrets, are invited to learn about the lives and deeds of female contemporaries who might serve as good examples – the Marquise de Rambouillet, for instance – instead of trying to find out what certain of their less exemplary peers would like to hide.

The least curious of the speakers is a man, Mériante, while the most curious are women, Artelice and Lysimène. Frivolous curiosity, the kind that leads not just to the description of the queen's entry but to 'the story of balconies, boxes, scaffolds'¹⁷ – the account of the show put on by the audience – is more particularly feminine. Although the other speakers contribute to this 'story', it is told at Lysimène's request. The bad examples of curiosity are the work of curious women: Méléandre speaks of one who 'goes to strange lengths and [...] would despair if she thought there existed an intrigue of which she knew nothing, a piece of news that circulated in society without her hearing it'.

14 'Désir, passion de voir, d'apprendre les choses nouvelles, secrètes, rares et curieuses. Il y a une bonne et une mauvaise curiosité'. In this dictionary the definitions of the adjective 'curious' partake of the same ambivalence: 'in the good sense', the curious person is 'he who wishes to learn and to see good things, the marvels of art and nature'; 'in the bad sense', he or she is 'intrusively curious to know the secrets of others'.

15 'vaine, inutile et bien souvent extravagante, qui se trouve dans l'esprit des hommes et des femmes'. Note that the other authors mentioned in this section – Plutarch, La Mothe Le Vayer and Furetière – do not associate malign curiosity with women.

16 'pénétrer (...) dans les secrets de la nature, ou dans ceux de toutes les sciences et de tous les arts' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 53).

17 'l'histoire des balcons, des loges et des échafauds' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 42).

Cléarque mentions a woman bereft of judgement or culture but curious about everything written in prose and verse; Lysimène cites a woman of lowly birth who is curious about the genealogy of everyone, then another who is loose herself yet curiously notes all the lapses of others around her, and one who is up to date on all love affairs while knowing nothing of any political news, however famous. The narrator also speaks of a woman who 'secretly reads others' letters'.¹⁸

Frivolous or ill-intentioned curiosity seems clearly to be a feminine attribute. The novella that follows the conversation confirms this. The terms 'curiosity' and 'curious' appear frequently; every character displays curiosity at one moment or another. In only two, however, is curiosity a true character trait. One is a woman, a 'capricious, bizarre and extraordinarily curious' princess who 'in keeping with her temperament, [...] contrived to do everything possible to learn all that Lysimante's heart held'.¹⁹ The other is the hero, Poliante, who declares that: 'I am curious by nature, and dare I say it, acute and penetrating enough to discern all the sentiments born of love and hate'.²⁰ This is not just curiosity about the greater or lesser foibles of his peers, but a more general curiosity about what is known today as psychology. In a century of changing social manners, marked by the adoption of courtly habits throughout the nobility, this curiosity is more indispensable, especially in elite society, than the kind that seeks the secrets of the sciences and arts. It is this quality that the work of Madeleine de Scudéry, whose conversations 'anatomise' the human heart,²¹ sets out to develop in her readers.

This curiosity to know the sentiments of men and women is bound up with the general trend in works of fiction, which engage increasingly in the presentation and analysis of inner life. The narrator of fiction penetrates the hearts and minds of the characters, revealing their most secret thoughts and feelings. In order that such a probe into hearts and souls might seem authentic, the fictional narrator disappears in the epistolary stories of the late seventeenth century. In the last third of the century, one woman who stands out in particular in

18 'liseuse de lettres à la dérobée'. All these examples are found on pages 47–50.

19 'capricieuse, bizarre et extraordinairement curieuse', 'pour suivre son humeur, [...], se mit dans la fantaisie de faire toutes les choses possibles pour savoir tout ce que Lysimante avait dans le cœur' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 140).

20 'Je suis naturellement assez curieux et, si je l'ose dire, j'ai l'esprit assez pénétrant et assez juste à connaître tous les sentiments que l'amour et que la haine donnent' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 89).

21 Sappho is able to 'anatomise the human heart', according to the story in which this poet is one of Mademoiselle de Scudéry's 'keys': *Artamène* (Paris, A. Courbé: 1656) Part x, book 2, 334.

her creative development of this genre of non-fictional fictions is Madame de Villedieu who wrote *Le Portefeuille* (1674) and *Les Mémoires d'Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1671–1674).

Proper and Improper Uses of Curiosity

The curious person enjoys being in the city, in the company of the like-minded. For corresponding reasons, Mériante prefers rural solitude. As we have seen, psychological curiosity is a desirable quality in a context of society life; however, in its degraded version (attraction to gossip, distrust of everyone, inquisition: letters secretly opened, eavesdropping, intrusive questions...) it undermines friendly relations between society people. For this reason it is firmly condemned by the speakers of *Célinde*. Yet whatever the drawbacks in this sense, curiosity has political benefits. It brings the provincials and foreigners to Paris to watch the queen's entry on August 26, 1661;²² it sends them to visit the tomb of Richelieu in the Sorbonne chapel.²³

Since well before Louis XIV, kings and princes had grasped the advantage in creating events that projected their greatness and in doing so assured their authority, but the Sun King was more concerned than his predecessors with asserting his authority. Hence the narrator's sycophantic commentary:

[...] could any curiosity be better founded than the wish to see the finest spectacle ever to be seen, the world's most beautiful princess and the greatest king on earth, followed by all the greatest and most illustrious of the world; to observe the most virtuous queen who ever reigned and the wisest and greatest minister to govern any state since the birth of monarchies, he who [...] has lately brought peace to all Europe and united a hundred divided states?²⁴

22 Scudéry, *Célinde* 36–37.

23 Scudéry, *Célinde* 52.

24 '[...] peut-il y avoir une curiosité mieux fondée que de vouloir voir le plus beau spectacle qu'on ait jamais vu, la plus belle princesse du monde et le plus grand roi de la terre, suivi de ce que la terre a de plus grand et de plus illustre et de voir pour spectatrice, la plus vertueuse reine qui jamais ait régné et le plus sage et le plus grand ministre qui ait gouverné des Etats depuis qu'il y des monarchies et qui [...] vient de donner la paix à toute l'Europe et de réunir cent états divisés?' The entry of August 26, 1661 also served to celebrate the Peace of the Pyrénées, signed on November 7, 1659.

Madeleine de Scudéry never ceases to praise royalty, the king in particular: like most writers of her time, she could not live without patronage. The passage in the conversation concerning the secrecy of letters and its violation by the wickedly curious should be understood in this context. 'Nothing is more truly our own than our thoughts', says one speaker, Cléarque, having just conceded that those who govern states are entitled to intercept letters. This concession, which justifies the development of the Black Chamber²⁵ and more generally that of a political inquisition, is not repeated by any other speaker: on the contrary, all insist on the right to secrecy.²⁶

There exists, then, a political use of curiosity. Everyone – but the social elite most of all – is curious about the life of the famous and powerful, while some are curious about architecture and art more generally; the state turns this curiosity to political ends, organizing celebrations and building monuments to the eternal glory of present-day princes. On August 26, 1661 the king fully satisfied the curiosity of all in attendance, offering a perfect entertainment, perfectly organized in its extreme variety. The aim is achieved: 'For my part', said Philinte, 'I admit that [the royal entry] gave me so exalted an idea of royal power that I was enthralled by it, and that nothing I have read of the ancient Triumphs ever captivated my imagination as agreeably as what I saw'.²⁷ The combination of the useful and the agreeable ('enthralled', 'agreeably'), which for the ancients should characterise the work of literature, is reprised here, displaced into the political domain. Thus the conversation remains profoundly coherent, despite addressing two very different objects of curiosity: the royal entry and a narrative fiction. The entry lasted eight hours²⁸ without becoming boring for an instant, because the spectacle was always varied and magnificent, always satisfying the curious taste for the new and the rare while stirring varied emotions in the spectators: amusement, joy, veneration, respect, astonishment.²⁹

25 Vaillé E., *Histoire de la poste française* (Paris: 1947–1955), especially book 4, and *Le Cabinet noir* (Paris: 1950).

26 Scudéry, *Célinde* 49–50. La Mothe Le Vayer makes no such concession, condemning all breach of secrecy in private as in political life. Nor is the concession present in the conversation on the secrecy of letters in *Clélie* (part 1, book 2): the only speaker with a political role, the Princess des Léontins, firmly denounces the violation of the secrecy of letters.

27 'Pour moi, dit Philinte, j'avoue qu'elle [l'entrée royale] m'a donné une si grande idée de la puissance royale que j'en suis charmé et que tout ce que j'ai lu des anciens Triomphes, ne m'a point rempli l'imagination aussi agréablement que ce que j'ai vu' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 38).

28 Scudéry, *Célinde* 38.

29 Scudéry, *Célinde* 38.

Diversity is recognized as the fundamental aesthetic characteristic of this kind of society literature; indeed, La Fontaine even made it his motto.³⁰

The description of the spectacle of the entry is followed by 'the story of balconies, boxes and scaffolds', a true human comedy. The speakers take turn to make satirical fun of the spectators' extravagances. Diversity – both social and moral – is once again the rule here, guaranteeing the interest of the spectacle.³¹ The curious are amused to observe their contemporaries' foibles and absurdities, just as they would in a theatrical comedy. In Madeleine de Scudéry as in Molière and other moralists of the time, ridicule is the effective means of reforming manners. In other words, even the curiosity that seems most frivolous can be of great moral usefulness.

Moralizing Curiosity

At the point in *Célinte* where the conversation turns to the subject of indiscreet and intrusively curious women, the narrator tells how she came to scold a friend for her compulsive secret reading of letters addressed to others. The narrator is the only one of the speakers to consider curiosity in terms of the reform of manners. Commentators, of course, have sought to assimilate this narrator to Madeleine de Scudéry herself,³² who throughout works of various kinds never ceased to emphasise the need to be useful to readers. Indeed, the speakers ask their friend to transcribe their conversation precisely because they think it will edify the curious in general.³³

The general project remains unchanged from novel to novella, but Madeleine de Scudéry adjusts it in accordance with the taste of readers, thus ensuring her own continued success. The reading of novels, she believed, should contribute to the enrichment of her female readers' culture, particularly the classical culture missing from their education.³⁴ Thus the long novels offered historical

30 La Fontaine, Jean de, "Le Pâté d'anguille", in *Contes*, ed. J.-P. Collinet (Paris: 1991) 863.

31 See for example this passage: 'For my part', said Lysimène, 'one of the things that most amused me was the sight of the varied emotions of the onlookers'. ['Pour moi, dit Lysimène, une des choses qui me divertit le plus fut de voir la diversité des sentiments de ceux qui regardaient'.]

32 All the more so given that the text is written in the first person.

33 Scudéry, *Célinte* 172.

34 On the elements of ancient culture in her fictions, Mademoiselle de Scudéry wrote in a letter of 1670 to Pierre-Daniel Huet: 'Women of intelligence should seek within reason to read the originals when finding things of this sort in novels. I have a friend who would never have known Xenophon or Herodotus had she not read the 'Cyrus', and by

panoramas, whether contemporary (*Ibrahim* is set in the Ottoman empire of the sixteenth century, under the reign of Süleyman) or ancient (*Artamène ou le grand Cyrus*, *Clélie*). This ambition appears to have been abandoned with *Célinde*.³⁵ Having noted that contemporary manners ascribed to ancient or foreign heroes were no longer seen as plausible, the novelist turned to novellas.³⁶ Indeed, as much to keep the support of protectors and patrons as to pique the curiosity of readers, she included 'keys'³⁷ (pseudonymous portrayals of real people) in her works in ever increasing number, starting with the fourth part of *Artamène* and the novel that followed. In this way her stories become gazettes³⁸ covering society and political news: this is certainly true of *Célinde*.

The anonymously published novella³⁹ opens with a warning from the book-seller to the reader regarding the author: 'Do not seek too curiously, Reader, to learn of this Novella's Author. I am forbidden to tell you the name, but you will easily guess it if you belong to society or are familiar with famous works of this kind'.⁴⁰ 'Curiously' is used here both in the old sense ('with care') and

reading them she came gradually to love history and even fable'. ['Les femmes qui ont de l'esprit doivent raisonnablement chercher à lire les originaux de ces sortes de choses dont elles trouvent des passages dans les romans ; et j'ai une amie qui n'eût jamais connu Xénophon ni Hérodote, si elle n'eût jamais lu le Cyrus, et qui en lisant s'est accoutumée à aimer l'histoire et même la fable.'] *Mademoiselle de Scudéry, sa vie et sa correspondance*, ed. E. Rathery-Boutron (Paris: 1873) 295.

35 The turn away from this form is temporary. *Mathilde*, in which Petrarch is an important character, and the 'Story of Prince Ariamène', a novella appearing in 1692 in the final collection of conversations, are rich in historical information.

36 At the opening of the narrative (in the second paragraph) we read: 'After this admission [that the story is written *à clef*], which I believed was needed in order to silence in advance those who might murmur that the ways of our time are ill-suited to the names of another century and country [...] ['Après cet avis [celui selon lequel il s'agit d'une histoire à clé] que j'ai cru nécessaire pour empêcher de murmurer ceux qui pourraient dire que toutes les coutumes de notre temps seraient mises mal à propos avec des noms d'un autre siècle et d'un autre pays [...]'] (Scudéry, *Célinde* 65).

37 There are many studies of this question. Here we will mention only number 54 of *Littératures classiques* (2005), "Lectures à clé".

38 See Morlet-Chantalat C., *La « Clélie » de Mademoiselle de Scudéry. De l'épopée à la gazette: un discours féminin de la gloire* (Paris: 2014).

39 The three preceding novels were published under the name of Madeleine's brother Georges.

40 'Ne t'informe point trop curieusement, Lecteur, de l'Auteur de cette Nouvelle. Il m'est défendu de t'en dire le nom, mais tu le devineras aisément, pour peu que tu sois du monde, ou que tu aies connaissance des fameux ouvrages de cette nature' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 33).

the modern one.⁴¹ Strictly speaking there is no 'key': Madeleine de Scudéry does not appear under a pseudonym as she does in the last part of *Artamène*, in the 'Story of Sappho'. As with any 'key', however, a strong sense of complicity is established among society's *happy few* [English in original]. The process of seeking what is hidden by allusion – as in a guessing game – cannot fail to excite curiosity. It is repeated, therefore, throughout the first part of the description of the entry: who is 'this man dressed in white taffeta, whose position almost no-one knows?'⁴² Who is the 'illustrious chief' of the Council?⁴³ Who is 'the finest looking man in all the world' commanding the cavalry of the Gendarmes?⁴⁴ And who commands the Swiss?⁴⁵ Who is 'this great and valiant prince who will always be talked about'?⁴⁶ Apart from the king, his brother and the queen, all participants in the occasion are referred to by allusion in the retelling.

The novella-within-a-novella that follows is presented as a *récit à clef*: before it even begins, we learn that 'it is an adventure in which several real events are described with the names changed'.⁴⁷ Additionally, it opens with the repetition of this point: 'So as not to trick the reader, I declare now that all the names in this novella are invented, but that by all appearances this adventure happened in our century, and in one of Europe's finest courts'.⁴⁸ It comes as no surprise, then, when Artelice comments as follows at the end of the novella: '[...] I believe I have guessed who is Célinte and who is Ariston, and I know very well that only the beginning of this adventure is true'.⁴⁹ The search for 'keys' in fictional texts – and in those of other kinds (the *Characters* of La Bruyère) – is a mode of reading that takes on considerable importance in the second half of the century.

41 See the lexical reading by Françoise Charpentier in Céard J. (ed.), *La Curiosité à la Renaissance* (Paris: 1986) 7–14.

42 'cet homme habillé de taffetas blanc dont presque personne ne connaissait la profession' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 38).

43 'illustre chef' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 38).

44 'l'homme du monde de la meilleure mine' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 39).

45 Scudéry, *Célinte* 39.

46 'ce grand et vaillant prince dont on parlera à jamais' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 41).

47 'c'est une aventure qui a plusieurs événements véritables et qu'on a écrite sous des noms supposés' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 57).

48 'Pour ne tromper pas le Lecteur, je lui déclare que tous les noms de cette nouvelle sont supposés mais que, selon toutes les apparences, cette aventure est arrivée en notre siècle, et dans une des plus belles cours d'Europe' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 65).

49 '[...] je crois deviner qui est Célinte et qui est Ariston et je connais bien qu'il n'y a que le commencement de cette aventure de vrai' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 169).

Madeleine de Scudéry, expert in metadiscourse, provides commentary on the stories she builds into her various narrative works, particularly in the conversations. Thus *Clélie* contains an inserted story⁵⁰ and a conversation on *récits à clef*. The 'Story of Artaxandre' opens with a declaration by the narrator, Amilcar, recalling the one that opens *Célinde*: 'Because I am deeply sincere, I must tell you from the outset that the names I will use in relating this adventure are invented, and that I will also change the places of the events that I shall speak of [...].'⁵¹ In the course of the conversation that follows, one woman is surprised by the 'excessive curiosity' surrounding the 'keys', because this aspect changes nothing 'in either the adventure or the sentiments' contained in the narrative.⁵² From this point onwards two distinct positions emerge: one claiming that the pleasure of the story depends solely on the author's art, the other that the pleasure is greater when the story is known to be true. Neither position is rejected, because tastes differ: what pleases some will not always appeal to others. For all the speakers in this conversation, pleasure is decisive in the judgement of stories, whether fictional or *à clef*.

When *Célinde* follows *Clélie*, the debate is resumed and deepened by Lysimène's answer to Artelice:

Believe me [...] you should never give way to that kind of curiosity. Treat this novella as the artifice of its inventor's wit and be sure that it is all one can do to find something of truth in history. Do not seek it in novels, which when they are well made should not only please but also improve the mind, imperceptibly sowing all the virtues in their readers' hearts.⁵³

50 *Clélie* is a long (or baroque) novel, meaning it is built on the model of the epic, via the Greek novel (the *Ethiopiques* of Heliodorus), with an opening *in media res* and inserted narratives.

51 'Comme je suis fort sincère, il faut que je vous dise d'abord que les noms dont je me servirai en vous racontant cette aventure sont des noms supposés, que je changerai aussi ceux des lieux et des choses que j'ai à vous dire se sont passées [...]', Scudéry, *Clélie*, ed. C. Morlet-Chantalat (Paris: 2001) Part 1, book 3, 437.

52 Scudéry, *Clélie* 500.

53 'Croyez-moi (...) ne vous mettez point cette curiosité- là dans la teste, regardez cette nouvelle comme un jeu de l'esprit de la personne qui l'a inventée et croyez que c'est bien tout ce qu'on peut faire de trouver quelque vérité dans l'histoire sans en chercher dans les romans qui doivent, quand ils sont bien faits, servir non seulement au plaisir mais encore à polir l'esprit et à insinuer insensiblement tous les sentiments vertueux dans le cœur de ceux qui les lisent' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 169–170).

The likes of Lysimène are not curious in the bad sense of the word. They disdain 'keys' and gossip or scandalous anecdotes about their peers: from the outset they seek the moral of the story, finding the moral edification behind the pleasure. The frivolous curiosity of the likes of Artelice must still be satisfied, but that should never be all. Every writer worthy of the name should be a moralist, especially those addressing society readers. Cléarque takes up Lysimène's theme as follows:

Books are the only sources of advice that never offend and whose counsel can comfortably be followed. However highly you esteem a friend who shows you to be at fault, you believe him to be mistaken, and even as you disbelieve him you secretly resent this witness to your failing. But a book is a blind man who never sees those he addresses and causes no blushes in those he advises, correcting them in an altogether more agreeable and tactful way. This is why all who write books should remember always to include an element of moral teaching, even in the subjects that seem furthest removed, since this, among all the sciences, is the most necessary and the most worthy of curiosity of all.⁵⁴

The task of the author, then, is to ensure that the frivolous curiosity of an Artelice (a woman) becomes the moral curiosity of a Lysimène and a Cléarque (respectively a woman and a man). Herein lies the secret of success for a society author, since, as Cléarque puts it, 'even things whose sole purpose seems to be amusement are more pleasing when some little moral hint is ingeniously placed in them'.⁵⁵ This is a return to the foundation of classical aesthetics: the alliance of pleasure and education. Most interesting is the idea that genre is of little consequence: society people care little for the hierarchy of genres and

54 'Les livres sont les seuls donneurs d'avis qui ne fâchent point et dont on peut plus aisément suivre le conseil. Car, quelque estime qu'on ait pour un ami qui vous avertit d'un défaut, on croit qu'il se trompe et, quand on ne le croirait pas, on sent un secret dépit d'avoir un témoin de sa faiblesse. Mais un livre est un aveugle qui ne voit point ceux qu'il reprend et qui ne faisant point rougir ceux à qui il donne des avis, les corrige plus agréablement et plus commodément tout ensemble. C'est pourquoi, il serait à désirer que tous ceux qui font des livres eussent toujours dans l'esprit de mêler un peu de morale, même dans les sujets qui en semblent le plus éloignés, puisque c'est la plus nécessaire de toutes les sciences et celle qui mérite le mieux d'être l'objet de la curiosité de tous les hommes', Scudéry, *Célinde* 170.

55 'même les choses qui semblent n'être absolument destinées qu'au divertissement plaisent davantage quand on y trouve quelque petit trait de morale ingénieusement placé' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 170).

the associated rules. The good work may be a novel, a novella or a collection of poems like those of Cléarque, to whom Artelice – showing herself to be the perfect society reader – observes that:

[...] without thinking of it you reveal to us your secret. For I, and several others too, have noticed a hundred times that in all your poems, from the most serious of all to the most courtly – from your admirable lines on the glory of the great Cléonime⁵⁶ to the couplets of the songs known to all the world and the ingenious inventions where you gave voice to the fruits and the birds – you have always sought to include some delicate hint of moral truth, showing that you hold this at heart. Perhaps this is for the good of the public, or perhaps for your own glory,⁵⁷ so that all will know that you are an honest man even more than a fine wit.⁵⁸

The good literary work may also take the form of a gazette, in this case that of Loret, who is praised under the name 'Télore' at the end of *Célinte*. *La Muse historique*⁵⁹ was a weekly gazette in verse, containing octosyllabic commentary on political and society news in a lightly mocking tone. It is Mériante – the least curious of the speakers, remember – who praises it in these terms:

[...] each week, the delightful reports [of Télore] amuse all those who know our language at all. See how, amid all that his imagination adds to make the truth more amusing, he never ceases to praise and blame in passing that which deserves praise or blame, sometimes painting comical portraits of the vices and virtues when the occasion arises; and what

56 The reference is to Richelieu. Cléarque is a 'key' for Paul Pellisson, whose works are those alluded to in this passage.

57 The simple gazetteer cannot lay claim to posterity, but this is not true of the moralist.

58 '[...] vous nous découvrez sans y penser votre secret car j'ai remarqué cent fois, et plusieurs autres avec moi, qu'en toutes vos poésies, même les plus sérieuses jusqu'aux plus galantes, depuis les beaux vers que vous avez faits à la gloire du grand Cléonime jusqu'à ces couplets de chanson qui ont couru le monde et à ces ingénieuses inventions où vous avez fait parler les fruits et les oiseaux, vous avez toujours cherché à mettre quelque trait délicat de morale qui fissent voir que vous l'avez dans le cœur, peut-être pour l'utilité du public, peut-être pour votre gloire, afin de faire connaître à tout le monde que vous êtes encore plus honnête homme que bel esprit' (Scudéry, *Célinte* 170).

59 See Putz F., "Jean Loret et les gazettes en vers burlesques", *Littératures classiques* ("L'Épître en vers au XVII^e siècle") 18 (1993) 185–196.

I find finer still is that in rather difficult times⁶⁰ he has always shown devotion to his prince, rousing the people to obedience.⁶¹

Thus it transpires that the fundamental qualities of Loret's gazette are precisely those of the novella praising them, *Célinde*, whose utility is at once political and moral.

The attraction to real-life events that characterised society literature led Madeleine de Scudéry to shift from the long novel to the novella, that is, to the history of the present. It is surely significant that she makes this move in 1661 with a reflection on curiosity. Fictions have their own means of arousing and maintaining the reader's curiosity. Ever since the Greek novel, heroic and mysterious characters, the inexplicable and extraordinary events that have ever abounded in fictions and ingenious constructions (especially that of the long novel opening *in media res* and interrupting the narrative at a crucial moment, inserting the main story) have been traditional methods of arousing curiosity. It is worth recalling here that a revival of the novel, which reaches its apotheosis in the long novels of the seventeenth century and those of the Scudéry siblings in particular,⁶² begins in 1548 with Amyot's translation of the novel of Heliodorus, *Les Ethiopiques*. Amyot praises the original work for its ingenious construction, which builds suspense and delays satisfaction of the reader's curiosity, only gradually revealing the information needed to understand the opening scene. These methods continue to be used in novellas: suspense and the extraordinary, which drive the reader's curiosity, also drive the fiction (whether presented as such or not) on the level of construction and plot. In *Célinde* an unknown knight takes command of a battle and saves the state: who is he? Everyone is 'curious' to know: the word 'curiosity' appears three times in the two pages describing the attempts to discover his identity.⁶³

60 Loret's first gazettes were written under the Fronde.

61 '[...] les agréables relations (de Télöre) servent toutes les semaines au divertissement de tous ceux qui ont quelque connaissance de notre langue. En effet, au milieu de tout ce que son imagination ajoute à la vérité pour la rendre plus divertissante, il ne laisse pas de louer et de blâmer en passant ce qui mérite d'être loué ou blâmé et de faire quelques fois de plaisantes peintures des vices et des vertus, selon que l'occasion se présente, et ce que je trouve encore fort beau, c'est que dans des temps assez difficiles, il a toujours paru zélé pour son prince et excité le peuple à l'obéissance' (Scudéry, *Célinde* 171).

62 See the preface of L. Plazenet to the edition of Amyot's translation published by Champion in Paris in 2009 (11–92). See also Molinié G., *Du roman grec au roman baroque: un art majeur du genre narratif en France* (Toulouse: 1982) and Lallemand M.-G., *Les Longs Romans du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 2013).

63 Scudéry, *Célinde* 136–137.

The knight's squire will tell what he knows of him,⁶⁴ but his story is incomplete and 'redoubles the curiosity of all those present rather than satisfying it'.⁶⁵ Fictional stories have always played on the reader's curiosity, but this curiosity joins forces with impatience in the readers of novellas so that they no longer enjoy the long novels for their grand narrative machinery and virtuoso effects of suspense.⁶⁶ The connection between fiction and curiosity remains constant, but the readership changes: the satisfaction of curiosity evolves and this evolution is one of the factors explaining the transition from the long novel to the novella in the seventeenth century. The traditional means of arousing curiosity clearly no longer satisfy the society milieu constituting the new audience that develops in the course of the century. Therefore Madeleine de Scudéry sets out to write a novella *à clef*⁶⁷ describing the political and social event of the year: the queen's entry into Paris. But Scudéry in no way abandons her ambition to educate readers: she insists that this society literature requires a moral reading. Society authors exploiting the curiosity of their audience must build into their amusing works 'some little moral hint, ingeniously placed'. (*Célinde* 170) Readers must make proper use of their curiosity in order to become, with Poliante, fine judges of human nature, that ever more indispensable branch of knowledge.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

La Mothe Le Vayer, François, *Petits traités en forme de lettres écrites à diverses personnes* (Paris, A. Courbé: 1648), Lettre xvi "De la curiosité" 180–188.

64 Scudéry, *Célinde* 138–143.

65 See Cave T., "‘Suspendere animos’: pour une histoire de la notion de suspens", in Mathieu-Castellani G. – Plaisance M. (eds.), *Les Commentaires et la naissance de la critique littéraire, France / Italie (XIV^e–XVI^e siècles)* (Paris: 1990) 211–218, and "Suspense and the Pre-History of the Novel", *Revue de littérature comparée* 4 (1996) 507–516.

66 The *histoire galante*, he wrote in 1683 in *Les Sentiments sur les Lettres et sur l'Histoire*, 'is above all highly suited to the prompt and lively sensibility of our Nation. We hate all that resists our curiosity, we would almost prefer to begin reading a book at the end, and we never fail to despise authors who care too little for the ways of satisfying us promptly', ed. P. Hourcade (Geneva: 1975) 44.

67 There were 'keys' in her earlier novels, particularly in *Clélie*, but the novel remained a fiction regardless. See also Lallemand, *Les Longs Romans du XVII^e siècle*.

- Plutarque (Plutarch), “De la curiosité”, *Œuvres morales*, tome VII, ed. J. Dumortier – J. Defradas (Paris: 1975) 266–284.
- Scudéry Madeleine de, *Célinde, nouvelle première*, ed. A. Niderst (Paris: 1979).

Secondary Sources

- Blumenberg H., *La Légitimité des temps modernes* (Paris: 1999; *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966).
- Bompart M. – Escola M. (eds.) “Lectures à clé”, *Littératures classiques* 54 (2005).
- Cave T., “ ‘Suspendere animos’: pour une histoire de la notion de suspens”, in Mathieu-Castellani G. – Plaisance M. (eds.), *Les Commentaires et la naissance de la critique littéraire, France / Italie (XIV^e–XVI^e siècles)* (Paris: 1990) 211–218.
- , “Suspense and the Pre-History of the Novel”, *Revue de littérature comparée* 4 (1996) 507–516.
- Céard J. (ed.) *La Curiosité à la Renaissance* (Paris: 1986).
- Godenne R., *Histoire de la nouvelle française aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Geneva: 1970).
- Ibrahim A., *Qu'est-ce que la curiosité ?* (Paris: 2012).
- Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.) *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998).
- Zonza C., *La Nouvelle historique en France à l'âge classique (1657–1703)* (Paris: 2007).

Mermaids, Women and Curiosity in Seventeenth-Century England

Susan Wiseman

The Scene draws, and discovers Valeria with Books upon a Table, a Microscope, putting a Fish upon it, several Animals lying by.

Enter *Lovely* [her suitor]

Valeria: ... Oh! Mr *Lovely*, come, come here, look through this Glass, and see how the Blood circulates in the Tale of this Fish.

Ensign *Lovely*: Wonderful. But it Circulates prettier in this Fair Neck.

Valeria: Pshaw – be quiet – I'll show you a Curiosity, the greatest that ever Nature made – (*Opens a Box*) in opening a Dog the other Day I found this Worm. ...¹

This scene from Susanna Centlivre's *The Basset Table* (1706) shows us gender and curiosity together. It explores the intersection of the gaze, knowledge and desire using the component parts of a mermaid – the lovely top and the fishy tail. The young heiress Valeria is in her dissecting room, 'several animals lying by' when her suitor, Ensign *Lovely*, joins the discussion. We can see immediately that Valeria is enthusiastic, perhaps obsessive, but ignorant. Although Valeria's investigations repeat those of William Harvey, who used fish as a ready example in tracking the circulation of the blood through vivisection, hers seem to be grounded in the senses and the objects of her gaze implied to be lowly.² Maybe Valeria's mistaking of the tapeworm for a 'Curiosity, the greatest that

1 This essay follows the conventions in modern editions used and in primary texts; in primary texts it does not correct v. The author is very grateful to the editors for suggestions and patience and especially grateful to L. Cottagnies for attentive reading. Remaining errors are my own.

Centlivre Susanna, *The Basset Table* [1706], ed. J. Milling (Peterborough – Plymouth: 2009), Act III. The scene follows both Harvey and, as Milling notes, Edward Tyson, in its descriptions (77, n.1). On recent theatrical interpretations of the play, see Copeland N., *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre* (Farnham: 2004) 163.

2 Harvey William, *An Anatomical Disputation Concerning the Movement of the heart and Blood (De Motu Cordis)*, trans. G. Whitteridge (Oxford: 1976) 32–35.

ever Nature made' hints at her misrecognition of her own desires as virtuosic rather than erotic. Valeria is fascinated, but, it is implied, it would have been more proper for her to be the object of Lovely's gaze, than the peering subject. At the same time, in this scene, we see an emblem of the problem of the gaze and who is looking. We also see the component parts of the mermaid – fish and woman, here lovely woman. In several ways this scene prompts us to ask what cultural work might be done by the mermaid, and, particularly by the curious gaze.

In examining the relationship between women and curiosity, seventeenth-century writing on the mermaid allows us to focus on one example in a long moment in the emergence of 'virtuous', forensic, curiosity. The mermaid's uncertain status and the different ways in which it was encountered or reported makes it a good example of the production of knowledge.³ Thus, while Peter Harrison explicitly discusses the 'rehabilitation' of curiosity as a shift of focus from the moral, or immoral, qualities of the search for knowledge to leave the procedures of 'scientific' investigation free of the taint of cupidity, this essay asks how the mermaid as something seen and unseen might allow us to nuance that much-circulated account of curiosity's rehabilitation.⁴ From Blumenberg's macrodiscussion to Barbara Benedict's literary exploration and Neil Kenny's elegant word study, discussions of curiosity agree, broadly, that 'curiosity' took a path from being a vice to being a virtue; they also agree in taking a longitudinal and large-scale approach to that shift.⁵ While broadly following these studies, this essay works on a very small scale to ask how the mermaid and associated questions of gender might complicate the path of curious sight from vice to virtue.

'I Beheld it Long': Seeing and Testimony

As we know, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sailors, travellers and voyagers sighted mermaids and mermen – but what was it that they saw? These

3 See also Pederson T.E., *Mermaids and the Production of Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Farnham: 2015).

4 Harrison P., "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England", *Isis* 92 (2001) 265–290; 265–266.

5 Blumenberg H. "The 'Trial' of Theoretical Curiosity" in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. M. Wallace (London: 1983) 229–453; Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: a Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001); Kenny N., *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998). See also Evans R.J.W – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London: 2006).

phenomena were reported in texts purporting to be witness testimony or reporting witness testimony. In 1610 Richard Whitbourne saw something fishy, which he supposes was 'a Maremaid or Mareman', in St John's harbour:

Very swiftly swimming towards me, looking cheerfully on my face, as it had been a woman: by the face, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, eares, necke and forehead, & in those parts so wel proportioned, having round about the head many blue streaks resemblling haire, but certainly was no haire, for I beheld it long, and another of my company also yet living, that saw the same coming so swiftly towards me, whereat I stepped backe; for it was come within the length of a long Pike, supposing it would have sprung aland to me.

Here, the issues of investigation and witnessing are very explicitly foregrounded, and the 'beautiful' creature described within the testimonial rhetoric used for witnessed wonders – both claiming credibility and documenting an extraordinary event. Whitbourne observed closely and 'beheld the shoulder & back downe to the middle, to be square, white and smooth as the back of a man; & from the middle to the hinder part, it was pointing in proportion something like a broad hooked Arrow'. Sociably, the creature visits several other ships including one containing 'William Hawkridge', at that time Whitbourne's servant, but at the time of writing an East India captain, and at that ship it 'put both its hands upon the side of the boat'.⁶ Readers are to know that the witnesses are truthful, that there were two and that they looked for long enough to verify the sighting.

In mermaid sightings it seems that detail validates the reliability of the story: witnesses are shown as reliable people, and often there are multiple witnesses. The gaze of the viewer is given ballast by circumstance and description of the actual phenomenon. For example, in *Purchas His Pilgrims* we find a story from a famous navigator, Henry Hudson, detailing an encounter while searching for the north-west passage:

The fifteenth, all day and night cleere sun-shine; the wind at East [...]. This morning, one of our companie looking over boord saw a Mermaid, and calling up some of the companie to see her, one more came up, and by that time shee was come close to the ships side, looking earnestly on the men: a little after, a Sea came and overturned her; from the Navill

6 Whitbourne Richard, "Conclusion", *A Discourse and Discovery of New-foundland* (London, Felix Kingston: 1623) sigs. P3v–P4r; see also Sheehan B.W., *Savagism and Civility* (Cambridge: 1980) 72–73.

upward, her back and breasts were like a woman, (as they say that saw her) her body as big as one of us; her skin very white; and long haire hanging downe behind, of colour blacke; in her going downe they saw her tayle, which was like the tayle of a Porpoise, and speckled like a Macrell. Their names that saw her was *Thomas Hilles* and *Robert Rayner*.⁷

While some sea sightings insist on animal phenomena and others suspend judgement between human and animal, many, like this account, layer witnessed event on evident visual assumptions about what to expect a mermaid to look like. The detail is forensic and mythic at the same time. Here, the gorgeous upper part seems to be slightly sexually charged with the alluring properties of mermaids familiar from folkloric narrative and classical myth. If the engagement with the event is immediate and experiential it is also lodged within a narrated world and as such condenses the experiential and the told. Although grounded in the testimony of two witnesses, the account is mediated by preceding stories; if an 'original' oral or textual story existed it is already being re-accommodated and retold – and the ways in which that happened gives us clues to the status of curiosity.

A story which is in many ways contrasting to 'wild', forensic and exotic, mermaid sightings is found in Thomas Lodge's *Learned Summarie* giving the sources of du Bartas, 'touching the Fishes that have resemblance of men and women'. It discusses a 'sea-women', washed up by a strong tide:

in the yeere 1403 there was fisht out of the Lake of Harlem in Holland a Sea-woman which had been driven thither by a spring-tide, which being brought into the towne, suffered her selfe to be clothed and fed with bread, milk and other meates: moreover she learned to spinne, and perform other pretty offices of women. She kneeled downe before the Crucifix, and obeyed her Mistresse, never spake, but all the rest of her life remained dumbe, and lived thus for many yeares.⁸

Industrious, mute and pious this 'sea-woman' satisfies simultaneously the desire for the domestic and the exotic. Discussing the power of Othello's

7 Hudson Henry, *Divers Voyages and Northern Discoveries of that worthy irrecoverable Discoverer Master Henry Hudson*, in Purchas Samuel, *Purchas His Pilgrims* (London, William Stansbie for Henrie Fetherstone: 1625) Bk III, chapter 14, 575.

8 Lodge Thomas et al., *A Learned Summarie upon the famous Poeme of Salust, Lord of Bartas* (London, Andrew Croke: 1637) 231. See also Lemmi C.W., *The Classic Deities in Bacon* (Baltimore: 1933) 20–24.

domestic stories relocated in the home of the virgin Desdemona, Wes Williams has argued convincingly that in the Renaissance and seventeenth century the monster is, increasingly, found in the home.⁹ However, though potentially physically a monster, this sea-woman is explicitly relieved of the powers and properties of sirens – mute, obedient, religious and productive, she is rapidly integrated as the most willing form of domestic labour. Lodge replaces the siren as a metaphor for whore or temptress with the mermaid at home. This narrative of the sea-woman offers a careful discrimination between harlots and goodwives, good and bad seawomen – but all are related to the pre-narrated ‘Tritons, Nereides, Syrens, Monkes and Sea-Bishops’. In terms of the place in the story of the mermaid, this is among the stories that most clearly situates the moral problem in the object sighted and known – it is the ‘sea-woman’ or the ‘siren’ which might be good or ill.¹⁰ However, even as she is not a siren (explicitly so), she is situated in another preceding narrative which exists explicitly in relation to it – that of domestication. So the eye of the witness is always, already, seeing stories.

‘Pictures of Mermaids’: Frames of Reference

If the forensic sightings of mermaids were often shaped by myth, the myths themselves were used to discuss wider questions including the senses and, from the early seventeenth-century, the nature of philosophical or ‘scientific’ investigation. There were several quasi-scholarly English vernacular texts forming a bank of literature to which sightings of mermaids might be referred, and which examine the question of mermaid myths and how mermaids relate to the senses – particularly sight. Sir John Davies’s philosophical poem, *Nosce Teipsum* is one example; it sits beside Philemon Holland’s translation of Pliny, Francis Bacon’s *Wisdom of the Ancients* (translated 1696) and, possibly most revealing, Thomas Browne’s comments on ‘the Pictures of Mermaids, Unicorns and some others’. The earliest of these texts, Philemon Holland’s translation of Pliny, takes us to Pliny’s own questioning of sources and the confusions of traditions of magic. Turning to Homer, he comments:

But the greatest wonder of all is this, that *Homer* the Poet, in his *Ilias* (a Poem composed puposedly of the Trojan warre) hath not so much as one word of Magicke. For what is meant by the variable transformations

9 Williams W., *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: 2011) 1–3.

10 Lodge, *A Learned Summarie* 231.

of **Proteus*, or by the songs of the Meremaids, whereof he writeth so much; but that the one was a great sorcerer, the other famous witches or enchauntresses?¹¹

These, then, are the sirens, arriving in Renaissance English in a history of the natural and supernatural world. They are assimilated to a vernacular way of understanding these creatures by a heading that translates sirens into mermaids – ‘Mermaids in Homer were witches, and their songs enchantments’. Holland is concerned at the absence of magic as an agent to generate transformation. As we know, the siren daughters of Calliope were not fishy-tailed but feathery-footed. However, as in this case in words, and as D.J. Gordon notes for the emblem tradition, the siren was transmitted through Renaissance emblems as a mermaid but also through a version with the original feathery feet.¹² As Holland’s re-articulation and Gordon’s comment suggest, the term mermaid could, but did not necessarily, claim a classical genealogy in the siren and, although even recent critics on the siren, such as Siegfried de Rachewitz, assume that the one stands for the other, it might be that this effaces part of the literary and cultural work done by the ‘mermaid’ in relation to gender and curiosity in the early modern period because the relationship between mermaid and siren attaches these creatures to the corpus of classical knowledge.¹³ For all that they belong in a discrete iconography and tradition, and are associated with air not sea, the qualities if not the iconography of the siren permeated mermaid lore; the traditions were both separate and melded.

The siren heritage of the mermaid means that, at least at times, discussion refers them to classical knowledge; a ‘sighting’ might productively be referred to folkloric, but also to Christian and classical learning. The way those two frames can be used is canvassed in Sir John Davies’s *Nosce Teipsum*, in which, as Peter Harrison notes, he offers ‘two elegies’ on correct objects of knowledge, in both of which curiosity features. The opening poem is an amusing yet embracing attack on ‘humane knowledge’ as a way of interpreting the ‘oracle’ to know oneself:¹⁴

Why did my parents send me to the schooles,
That I with knowledg might enrich my mind,

11 Pliny, *Historie of the World*, trans. P. Holland (London, A. Islip: 1601) t. 2, 372.

12 Gordon D.J., *The Renaissance Imagination* (Berkeley – London: 1975) 68.

13 De Rachewitz S., *De Sirenibus: an Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare* (New York – London: 1987).

14 Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy” 265–266.

Since the *desire to know* first made men fooles,
And did corrupt the roote of all mankind?

The question of why pursue knowledge, raised as if casually here, is developed throughout the two poems and the pursuit of 'humane' knowledge is characterised as repeating the mistake of our first parents:

But we their wretched Offspring, what do we?
Do not we still tast of the fruite forbid?
Whiles with fond, fruitelesse curiositie,
In bookes prophane we seeke for knowledge hid?¹⁵

Ultimately, then, for Davies, the search for knowledge must be channelled through the proper study of mankind – 'man' not in the sense of the humanly shaped member of a social and educational world but, crucially, by an enquiry into the soul:

For how may we to others things attaine,
When none of vs his owne *Soule* vnderstands?
For which the Diuell mockes our curious braine,
When *know thy selfe* his oracle commands.¹⁶

Human knowledge is outward-facing – and so potentially problematic. Building on this injunction, the second elegy focusses on knowledge of all things through knowledge of the soul and throughout emphasises the soul's role in policing the channels of sense.

For Davies, for all that he is placing curiosity and the mermaid in a Christian context, the story of Ulysses does show the pagans disciplining the senses:

Did *Sense* perswade *Vlysses* not to heare,
The Mermaids songs, which so his men did please,
As they were all perswaded through the eare
To quit the ship, and leape into the *seas*?¹⁷

Human reason has its uses and, strikingly, for Davies the pagans, at least the higher pagans and here the wily Ulysses, have the ability to use human reason

15 Davies Sir John, *Nosce Teipsum* (London, Richard Field for John Standish: 1599) 2 (STC (2nd ed.) 6355.4).

16 Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* 3.

17 Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* 18.

to discipline sense (and curiosity) and so to navigate the crisis of the sirens. This scene evokes an experiential drama of the peril of the senses – through hearing, in this case. As we have seen, Ulysses's story shapes the way travel narratives shape mermaids as seen, and we here find that story also at the heart of a text on the soul and knowledge.

If for Davies the pagans can discipline sense, and the sirens show this, the soul can have curiosity; for all that human curiosity is problematic the soul, too, is curious – and close to the end of the second poem, as the disciplined soul has ordered its relationship to the sensory and other resources of knowledge, curiosity resurfaces:

And thou my *Soule*, which turnst thy Curious eye,
To view the beames of thine owne forme diuine,
Know, that thou canst know nothing perfectly,
While thou art Clouded with this flesh of mine.¹⁸

Curiosity is central to Davies's argument, and Davies's sustained thinking on the concept arguably deserves greater recognition in thinking on curiosity. Where Harrison finds the poem condemning curiosity, it in fact weaves a nuanced drama of curiosity through the text in a careful discrimination of the object of curious eye (and the nature of the gaze) – and ends with a deliberate validation of that eye turned on the godly object in relation to which all the orders of knowledge emanate in correct order.¹⁹ However, while the picture of curiosity that emerges in *Nosce Teipsum* is indeed morally polarised – human reason is potentially sinful if used without divine aid – it is also complex in using the sirens as an emblem of curiosity resisted (by a pagan) and in making the soul's eye 'curious'. The poem is helpful in relation to mermaids in that it suggests that in the late sixteenth century, as least for Davies working within the Christian tradition, curiosity's moral status was tied to the relationship between subject and object and, as the proper object of Christian

18 Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* 101.

19 Harrison, "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy" 265–266. More, if curiosity has at least a lexical place in the search for a good death, it is also the case that the soul is gendered female – in the right use of the soul the human is instructed on the use of her assistants – 'Kill not her *quickning power* with surfettings', and 'Cast not her serious *wit* on idle things' or 'her free *will* slauē to vanities' (100). Of course, that *anima* is female may well have assumptions in it that make the human body male – so perhaps the soul's gender must be regarded as complex and outside the argument.

knowledge is clear, the task is to search with the soul's curious eye and reason as an aid. The subject's aim is to work with the soul as its object.

Much of Francis Bacon's writing touches the terrain of curiosity, but not mermaids, so he is only tangential to the specifics of this argument. When he engages fable, in *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, however, his work is on the terrain in which mermaids and curiosity both appear. Bacon offers two orienting formulations which show scepticism about fable and, perhaps, an increasing pressure to make explicit that fable is a mode of thinking, not a description of the world. Bacon is investigating classical knowledge and characterises the 'curiosity of Men, in prying into secrets, and coveting with an undiscreet desire to attain the knowledge of things forbidden', as about religious or political issues and gives Pentheus as an example of religious prying, Actaeon, as an example of political curiosity. Actaeon, as he puts it, having 'as it were by chance beheld *Diana* naked, was turned into a Stag, and devoured by his own Dogs'. Pentheus, too, suffers because of 'a desire to be a spectator of the hidden sacrifices of *Bacchus*'.²⁰ Pentheus, afflicted by double vision after seeing the Bacchic rituals, Bacon describes as:

[...] by the height of Knowledge and Nature in Philosophy, having climbed, as it were, into a Tree, do with rash attempts (unmindful of their frailty) pry into the secrets of Divine Mysteries, and are justly plagued with perpetual inconstancy, and with wavering and perplexed conceits: For seeing the light of Nature is one thing, and of Grace another; it happens so to them as if they saw two *Suns*.²¹

Contrastingly, in 'The Syrens or Pleasures', Bacon asserts that the 'Fable of the *Syrens* seems rightly to have been applied to the pernicious allurements of Pleasure', but, he continues, 'in a very vulgar and gross manner' which invites him to rethink the application. Pleasure, he argues, is provoked by 'the abundance and superfluity of all things, and also out of the delights and jovial contentments of the Mind' which are bridled by 'Learning and Education' and that

20 Bacon Francis, *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, written in Latin and translated by 'Sir Arthur Gorges, Knight' (London, H. Herringman, R. Scot, R. Chiswell, A. Swalle, and R. Bentley: 1696) 40 (Wing B296). There is continuing scholarly discussion concerning how to interpret Bacon's project in engaging with the ancients and how to position it within his thinking. See e.g. McKnight S.A., "The Wisdom of the Ancients and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*", in Debus, A.G. – Walton, M.T. (eds.), *Reading the Book of Nature the Other Side of the Scientific Revolution, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies* 41 (1998) 91–162; 92–97.

21 Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* 41.

careful learning requires that a reader must attentively interpret the part of the story about the sirens which calls attention to the heaps of lovers' bones seeming at a distance like white cliffs – sight is not to be trusted because the eye looks with desire, not objectivity.²² Once again, the sirens point to a need for sensory discipline in finding knowledge. Fables, for Bacon, must return the reader to right investigation – 'undiscreet desire' is to be restrained by 'learning and education'.

Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (London, A. Maxwell: 1666), situated in some ways between texts documenting sightings and philosophical enquiry, takes up both mythical creatures and the question of how the natural world is most accurately to be observed. Sightings and classical writing are held together in this mid-century text which offers its own version of the 'syrens or fish-men', and analyses the question of objects, mechanisms and subjects from a distinct point of view. Cavendish defends this 'work of fancy' joined to her 'philosophical contemplations' as though a product of 'fancy', also an enquiry 'into the causes of natural effects', nevertheless, also an action of the 'rational parts of matter'.²³ Recognizing that mid-century readers might question fiction's descriptive purchase on nature, Cavendish both divides and joins fictional and empirical. She offers a defence of rational enquiry and fantasy as both products of reason. There is no explicit prompt to suggest that Cavendish was writing in relation to the sirens and Ulysses. Yet where Ulysses resists seduction on a boat, Cavendish's lady suffers 'forced' abduction, potentially rape, and is eventually rescued from being adrift in ice floes. This, then, is the scene of knowledge in which the lady is herself a wonder – the bear-men of the new world 'holding up their paws in admiration' – and soon an investigator and commander of knowledge and engines 'much to be taken notice of by experimental philosophers'.²⁴ Thus, in the situation described in the opening of *The Blazing World*, the lady is adrift and is sighted, yet she is herself, at the same time, discovering strange new beings. This situation both echoes the genre of a 'sighting' and complicates any stable binary of observed and observing. We can recognise the vocabulary of natural philosophy and of curiosity but the subject positions associated with these worlds are unsettled, redeployed and recombined. Approaching *The Blazing World* from the point of view of forensic sightings, we might consider both the lady and her initial interlocutors the bear- and fox- men both as the discoverers and the

22 Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* 41.

23 Cavendish Margaret, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. K. Lilley (London: 1992) 123.

24 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 127, 129.

wonders discovered. From the point of view of philosophical enquiry, the early part of the narrative establishes the lady as a human wonder but also, significantly, as enquiring into natural philosophy.

The beings who the Empress encourages in 'arts and sciences' include, 'bear-men, some worm-men, some fish or mear-men, otherwise called syrens; some bird-men, some fly-men, some ant-men', and as well as being exotic hybrids these also follow 'a profession as was most proper to their species, which the Empress encouraged them in'.²⁵ Thus, the empress erects schools and founds societies for the study of arts and sciences in which '[t]he bear-men were to be her experimental philosophers, the bird-men her astronomers, the fly-, worm- and fish-men her natural philosophers' in a reversal which makes the creatures investigated by earthly philosophers into 'societies' of 'vertuosos'.²⁶ The Mermen are tasked with reporting on the seas and, following Harvey, the question of whether or not all sea creatures 'have blood' – precisely the topic Valeria in *The Basset Table* is investigating. The Empress is told that only some sea creatures have blood and they agree with the Empress that some creatures are 'neither flesh, nor fish'.²⁷ In what follows the virtuosi report on the universe and on its secrets and allow the empress to put in tension the prosthetic abilities of the telescope and the role of the senses as reporters in her well-known critique of the telescopes which, she tells them, 'delude your senses' and must be broken, but they beg to keep them because they 'take more delight in artificial delusions, than in natural truths'. Thus, Cavendish unsettles (or recognises as unstable?) subject and object in curiosity by having extraordinary creatures work as the empress's investigators, not objects of wonder.

The Empress prioritises natural sight (joining sense and reason) over the prosthetic microscope and telescope, telling the bear-men that these visual tools are 'false informers' and '[n]ature has made your sense and reason more regular than art has your glasses, for they are mere deluders' and to be broken.²⁸ Ultimately, the Empress brings to an end the debates of the hybrid philosophers and uses the knowledge gained to bring the population into awe through the decoration of chapels.²⁹ For Cavendish, in this text at least, the ultimate use of curiosities is as an aspect of awe and power – to exact willing (and unwilling) theological obedience. Curiosities, secrets, are ultimately the

25 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 134.

26 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 134. See also Cottegnies, *supra*.

27 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 146–147.

28 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 142; see also 143, 158, 162.

29 Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 163–165.

secrets of power which, like the firestone, come from hidden sources, serve those who control them and blaze forth in their effects.

Cavendish's text, then, subjects curiosity in both travellers' tales and natural science to scrutiny and analysis – disturbing several of the key issues. While the eye is important for Davies and Bacon, *The Blazing World* crystallises sight as a central problem – looking and what is seen is a central dispute between the Empress and her practitioners. The gaze, for Cavendish, is linked to the mode of looking and she asserts human perception as better than the prosthetics espoused by the materialists. Set in the company of other texts canvassing mermaids and curiosity, Cavendish's text stands out as a notably complicated account of subject and object of the gaze in her refusal to absolutely assign a viewing position; but most significant is her rejection of the prosthetic gaze, not as basely sensory but as inaccurate. If the Empress (and so Cavendish, maybe) is ultimately on the losing side in the debate on the usefulness of the microscope, *The Blazing World* is nevertheless sharply attuned to the significance of sight as a key location of controversy over nature and fiction.

For both the critical philosophers and the fascinated re-circulators of stories, the senses are important and sight is the key sense. Cavendish is unusual in varying the position allocated to the mermaid as observed. The question of the observer is also highly significant for Sir Thomas Browne. The route Browne takes with regard to the eye is to discriminate the accurate and inaccurate gaze. Finding that the mermaid circulated as an image that was a composite of images and stories, Browne unpicks the fiction. He characterises the relationship between the late seventeenth-century English reading or browsing subject and the mermaid as:

Few eyes have escaped the Picture of Mermaids; that is, according to Horace his Monster, with womans head above, and fishy extremity below: and these are conceived to answer the shape of the ancient Syrens that attempted upon Ulysses, which notwithstanding were of another description, containing no fishy composure, but made up of Man and Bird.³⁰

Browne's approach takes the scene of looking as condensing texts and visual phenomena and starts with the most present aspect of his culture, the mermaid and the dominance of the image. Browne discounts the contemporary image as it circulates and which belongs, for him, with the unicorn. In Tom Tyler's terms, he seeks to distinguish 'the genuine turmoil of the heteroclite' from the

30 Browne Sir Thomas, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. R. Robins (Oxford: 1981) 2 vol., volume 1, 415–418; 414.

merely 'incongruous', but also from myth.³¹ Such creatures Browne plans to leave in peace: 'we shall not enlarge with what incongruity, and how dissenting from the pieces of Antiquity, the Pictures of their gods and goddesses are described, and how hereby their symbolical sense is lost'. However, in cases where 'the real works of Nature, or veritable acts of stories are to be described', art 'must not vary from the verity of the example; or describe things otherwise than they truly are or have been. For hereby introducing false Idea's of things it perverts and deforms the face and symmetry of truth'.³² Circulation of the image, for Browne, splits truth and the reader, where a proper division is between myth and the real – and the real, natural, world demands verification.

To summarise, Brown intervenes in a situation where mermaids were mobile, often (not always) feminised, problematic (in being associated in all versions with masculine death) and enigmatic. When they occur what is at stake is the 'natural' world and its boundaries; the credibility or otherwise of the observer, and the place or nature of knowledge and myth. For Browne, the subject must have a powerful relation to the truth, if necessary at the expense of (untrue) stories.

The evidence examined suggests that in much writing of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the curious gaze is central, apparently increasingly so, in the activities associated with curiosity. The desire to see and know is shared between scientific enquiry and sexual curiosity, and in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries wonders help us to see the dynamics of that debate. Famously, in the early eighteenth century James Duplessis's manuscript collection of wonderful births includes a hermaphrodite with a lift-the-flap panel. Less famously, on the verso of the page with the flap is glued in a printed image of the genitals of a classical hermaphrodite.³³ Duplessis uses the old genre of the catalogue of wonders to display the monstrous and prodigious births he has witnessed. Many of the creatures and humans catalogued by Duplessis are 'found' examples regenericised from populist print and transferred, lavishly repainted and adapted. His text does not sport a mermaid. It shows us, however, a vernacular instantiation of the process Browne discusses of scopic desire and knowledge played out in the circulation of printed and visual materials.

The curious reader that lifts the flap on Duplessis's hermaphrodite is reading a complex text – a manuscript made up, literally assembled, from cuttings;

31 Tyler T., *Ciferae: A Bestiary in Five Fingers* (Minneapolis: 2012) 245.

32 Browne, *Pseudodoxia* 417–418.

33 Duplessis James, "A Short History of Human Prodiges & Monstrous Births of Dwarfs", BL MS Sloane 5246 ff. 34.

illuminated drawings; stories and witnessed events. Although manuscript, Duplessis's text is in many ways typical of the ways in which mermaids are articulated for a reading public. Duplessis's text shares with some others a tendency to replay the scene of knowledge to give the reader a frisson of pleasure at revelation – the lap lifting is, perhaps, the most obvious engagement of the senses in an activity that would evidently be understood as profane knowledge.

The mermaid escapes Duplessis's collecting book and incitement to wonder – but she need not have, as popular mermaid stories were available. Amongst these was a one-sheet text from the mid-century, reprinted up to 1689, *The beginning, progress, and end of man*, which offers a popular game of curiosity as a finger-folding rhyme. Starting with Adam we are instructed:

Here *Adam* first leads up the Van,
(true Mirroure of unstained life;)
Till that he grew a Married Man,
turn up the Leaf and see his Wife.

And so, turning the leaves up and down we are taken through the Fall and Bible stories on a steady trajectory towards death. The implications of the mermaid in popular culture are stated in visual terms part way through this trajectory:

Eve in her Virgins blush Array'd,
her Face more fair, her smiles are freer;
But would you see a stranger Maid,
turn down the Leaf and you shall see her
Eyes look not on the Mermaids face,
and Ears forbear her Song;
Her Face hath an alluring Grace,
more charming is her Tongue.

The mermaid, even in 1689, puts into play the problem of desire and terror in terms of sight, as suggested by Thomas Browne. Operating as a locus of desire, the mermaid is used to expose Eve's deathly implications and to supply her lower half as problematic. Ill-disciplined, gaming, desire to know is jokingly punished by the substitution of a mermaid's tail for a woman. The complex folding game is that of exposure of the gaze with the final frisson of death. Fusing pleasure and knowledge in a repeated invitation to look, and know more accurately by turning up or down a leaf, the game of life and death allows pleasure and fear to exist simultaneously and this fusion is perhaps most intensely

present in the splicing of Biblical Eve and the mermaid. Moreover, the gamer sees what she or he ‘asks for’ – desire shapes the vision.

‘Prying’ or ‘Ingenious’? Gender and the Curious Eye

Bacon called curiosity ‘prying’ and made Pentheus a ‘spectator’ of hidden things.³⁴ The nature of sight, the sense always strongly associated with curiosity as inquisitiveness, sexual curiosity, spying, is tested by both Duplessis’s flap and explicitly by the literal revelations of the folding game. Duplessis’s text does not indict, but allows, the pleasure of revelation of knowledge made through sight, as does the folding game, in a way that implies a sting in the (mermaid) tale. Arguably, Duplessis’s text imagines a male reader and viewer, and the game might be received differently by a male or female player. As so often, women (or girls) feature as both potentially curious players and curious creatures – like their monstrous mermaid kin. Yet what each of these texts shows is that at the end of the seventeenth century what validated or undermined curiosity was not so much the object, as the state of the viewer. Such status is a particularly thorny problem – and one resting on complex negotiations with an audience or reader grounding the subject as a virtuous or problematic viewer. When Neil C. Manson suggests that, in the past as in the present, ‘epistemic restraint’ is what decisively divides knowledge from culpable curiosity, he draws many of his examples from the need to discriminate and discipline sight – to differentiate between the restrained, objective gaze of the scientist or aesthete and the prying eye of a nosey-parker, or the lustful gaze of an epicure.³⁵ As Mary Baine Campbell notes, that pornography and natural science emerged simultaneously as specialist discourses is meaningful in their shared concerns and insistence on the part played by the graphic detail (Aretino’s drawings, Hooke’s flea).³⁶ And, as Margaret Jacob puts it, ‘the ability to mechanize and atomize physical nature emerged roughly between the 1650s and the 1690s’.³⁷

Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World* is bound up with the changes discussed by Campbell and Jacob and, as we have seen, even as it problematizes sight

34 See introduction, *supra*.

35 Manson N.C., “Epistemic restraint and the vice of curiosity”, *Philosophy* 87.2 (2012) 239–259.

36 Campbell M. Baine, *Wonder and Science* (Ithaca – London: 1999) 182–24.

37 Jacob M.C., “The Materialist World of Pornography”, in Hunt L. (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography* (New York: 1993) 157–203; 158.

as a tool of religion, it prioritises human sight over prosthetic (microscope) in apprehension of the world. At least the Empress, within the text, implicitly endorses the connection between visual sense and practical knowledge versus the deceiving but also over-theoretical, impractical, knowledge generated by the gaze of virtuosi. Cavendish was disputing on terrain that was crucial to the lexical and ideological separation of the virtuosi from the pornographers – and she is highly distinctive in her unsettling of the allocation of virtues and vices in graphic and detailed sight and examination. Her tendentious position is unusual but crucially addresses the issue that was at stake – how and why the looker looks. On the question of matter, in *The Blazing World*, the Empress is specific – ‘there is no more but one constitutive principle of nature, to wit, self-moving matter’.³⁸ The microscope in *The Basset Table* is not at fault, as it is in *The Blazing World*; rather it is the gaze which is indicted. Here, the microscope is misused by a desiring looker. It seems to be the user of the technology which makes all the difference in Valeria’s case – after all, some of what she is doing repeated the experiments of William Harvey himself, surely an example. Valeria’s use of the tool shows us what is at stake in late seventeenth-century curiosity – the discrimination or mixing of virtuosic and problematic sight.

For all that sight was the highest sense, its discursive history in the seventeenth century registers the necessity to ensure that the intellect, not desire, is in charge of the gaze (as Jacqueline Watson has argued).³⁹ If virtuosic sight is, because of its activities, in constant danger of being graphic and forensic, then, it seems, the allocation of all the pitfalls of the wrong kind of looking to women may, in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth, be bound up with both the need for a barrier between popular, pornographic, knowledge and the dissective eye. As has become clear, the validation of masculine curiosity was intimately mingled with the processes of investigation associated with materialist investigation. Yet, at the same time, the senses, and primarily sight, used in this investigation were understood as compromised – capable of being claimed for both desire and restraint, science and pornography. It seems that the specific strand the mermaid discloses about women and curiosity is that, potentially, the importance of sight in materialism brings with it a corresponding urgency to ensure its restraint; certainly, the figure of Valeria offers an implicit contrast to the restrained, masculine, mode of investigation.

38 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 154.

39 Watson J.W., “ ‘Dove-like looks’ and ‘serpents eyes’: staging visual clues and early modern aspiration”, in Smith S. – Watson J. – Kenny A. (eds.), *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660* (Manchester: 2015) 39–54; 49–52.

To illustrate the instability of the virtue and credibility of the virtuosic gaze, and to see its stabilization within institutions of knowledge we can turn to the exotica of the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society. The *Transactions* of 1676 includes a sighting within the ethnographic account of 'Mr Thomas Glover, an ingenious Chirurgion that hath lived for some years' in Virginia':

I took a small book out of my pocket to read; but I had not read long before I heard a great rushing and flashing of the water, which caused me suddenly to look up, and about half a stones cast from me appeared a most prodigious Creature, much resembling a man only somewhat larger, standing right up in the water with his head and neck, shoulders, breast and waste, to the cubits of his arms, above water; his skin was tawny, much like that of an *Indian*; the figure of his head was pyramidal, and slick, without hair; his eyes large and black, and so were his eye-brows.

As the formidable masculine specimen swims away Glover sees his arms and, 'at last he shoots with his head downwards, by which means he cast his tayl above the water, which exactly resembled the tayl of a fish with a broad fane at the end of it'.⁴⁰ Might Centlivre have seen comic potential in a man reading enraptured by a pointy-headed swimmer? The desire and fantasy a satirist might see in such a scene is muted by the bolsters to Glover's gaze. The virtuosic gaze is forensic, medical and ethnographic and has the imprimatur of the Royal Society. Without these aids to interpretation, though, the inclusion of this episode in a volume devoted to the 'Studies and Labours of the Ingenious' would register, perhaps, as extraordinary and exotic rather than scientific 'labour'. The prosthesis, indeed the gaze itself, depends on the user and what we see is a struggle to allocate virtue to forensic sight.

To substantially revise the longer synthetic narratives of curiosity is beyond the scope of this essay; however, the mermaid does point to a significant moment in curiosity's re-alignment with 'scientific' endeavour. It seems, then, that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stories of the mermaid-sightings, rethinking of Ulysses and philosophical meditations – in focussing on sight –, allow us to track a struggle over the culpability of the gaze at a key moment in the post-Civil War emergence of forensic cultures – popular and scientific. In the discrimination of science and other forms of the gaze women, as in *The Basset Table*, work to ensure masculine probity, restraint and objective enquiry as distinct from all the possible problems associated with the subjective gazer.

40 Glover Thomas, "An Account of Virginia", *Philosophical Transactions* (London, Royal Society: 1676) Vol. XI, 623–636; 625–626.

Valeria, then, is the lucky recipient of all the problems of the curious gaze. Yet, even as she shows to us the problems of the wrong person looking through the microscope, as a theatre audience we can hardly help seeing, too, that it is a woman here who does indeed have hold of the fish and the prosthesis – and so, perhaps, the tale?

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Browne Sir Thomas, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* [1646-], ed. R. Robins (Oxford: 1981).
 Cavendish Margaret, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. K. Lilley (London: 1992).
 Centlivre Susanna, *The Basset Table* [1706], ed. J. Milling (Peterborough – Plymouth: 2009).
 Davies Sir John, *Nosce Teipsum* (London, Richard Field for John Standish: 1599).
 Glover Thomas, “An Account of Virginia”, *Philosophical Transactions* (London, Royal Society: 1676) Vol. XI, 623–636.
 Pliny, *Historie of the World*, trans. P. Holland (London, A. Islip: 1601).
 Purchas Samuel, *Purchas His Pilgrims* (London, William Stansbie for Henrie Fetherstone: 1625).
 Whitbourne Richard, “Conclusion”, *A Discourse and Discovery of New-foundland* (London, Felix Kingston: 1623).

Secondary Sources

- Benedict B.M., *Curiosity: a Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: 2001).
 Campbell M. Baine, *Wonder and Science* (Ithaca – London: 1999).
 Copeland N., *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre* (Farnham: 2004).
 Gordon D.J., *The Renaissance Imagination* (Berkeley – London: 1975).
 Harrison P., “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England”, *Isis* 92 (2001) 265–290.
 Jacob M.C., “The Materialist World of Pornography”, in Hunt L. (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography* (New York: 1993) 157–203.
 Kenny N., *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998).
 Manson N.C., “Epistemic restraint and the vice of curiosity”, *Philosophy* 87.2 (2012) 239–259.
 Pederson T.E., *Mermaids and the Production of Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Farnham: 2015).
 Watson J.W., “‘Dove-like looks’ and ‘serpents eyes’: staging visual clues and early modern aspiration”, in Smith S. – Watson J. – Kenny A. (eds.), *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660* (Manchester: 2015) 39–54.

The Interrogative Anne Conway: Curiosity in a Philosophical Context

Sarah Hutton

The main focus of this paper will be the English woman philosopher, Anne Conway, in the context of what has come to be recognized as a ‘culture of curiosity’ in the early modern period.¹ It is now well established that ‘curiosity’ is a polyvalent term with a range of meanings, both positive and negative. And it is also well-established that in the seventeenth century there is a shift toward more positive evaluation of curiosity, although without displacing predominantly negative connotations, particularly in respect of women. Most of the meanings of curiosity had to do with knowledge. Excessive or ‘idle’ curiosity was discouraged in both men and women. Excessive curiosity was traditionally seen as a female failing with dire consequences, thanks to its association with Eve. Nevertheless increasingly positive evaluations of female curiosity raise the question of whether there is a link to the fact that this period sees the appearance of several female philosophers. But this is a question that can hardly be answered without some consideration of treatments of curiosity in philosophical discourse of the time. Discussion of curiosity in philosophical writings is an area that has been largely, though by no means completely, overlooked in recent studies of curiosity.

As it turns out, curiosity assumes a new significance in the philosophy of the seventeenth century. And philosophical discussion of curiosity highlights the fact that curiosity entails consideration of *practice* as well as theory. Philosophy raises important questions about how the search after truth should be pursued, how knowledge is acquired, and the purpose of such investigations. This is particularly relevant to the emergence of experimental natural philosophy in the seventeenth century, where curiosity is a spur to discovery. But philosophical consideration of curiosity is not confined to natural philosophy: there were taken to be ethical considerations attaching to curiosity, arising from questions

1 Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004). See also Kenny N., *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998); Daston L. – Park K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: 1998); Evans R.J.W. – Marr A. (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot: 2006).

about the end or purpose of philosophical enquiry, and about how the search for knowledge should be pursued.

In what follows, I shall sketch some of the philosophical accounts of curiosity, in order to set the context for my discussion of Anne Conway. In the second part of the paper, I revisit Anne Conway's writings to consider in what respects her pursuit of philosophy reflects these issues. As I shall show, Conway has little or nothing to say about curiosity *per se*, but there are important respects in which her thinking has direct bearing on curiosity, in particular the interrogative stance which she takes in her investigations of knowledge and truth. By examining both her philosophical treatise and her wider philosophical activity in her letters and her circle, I shall show that they all exhibit similarities, taking the form of dialogue, of question and answer. And in all cases it is she, apparently, who asks the questions. I shall attempt to answer some of the questions which this raises – whether this interrogative stance is curiosity, whether she was motivated by a desire to know; and whether this has implications for the alleged 'rehabilitation of curiosity'.²

Curiosity and the Philosophers

It is beyond the remit of this paper to give an exhaustive account of the philosophical fortunes of curiosity in the seventeenth century. I shall briefly sketch the views of some of those most relevant to discussions of women philosophers and curiosity. But it is worth noting, first, that discussions of curiosity by philosophers probably explain why it appears in university debates, as Neil Kenny notes.³ Secondly, as Line Cottegnies and Sandrine Parageau point out in the introduction to this volume, curiosity came to be linked in a positive way with experimental forms of enquiry: curiosity is often linked to 'virtuosi', that is to say the natural philosophers of the Royal Society, who adopted experimental modes of investigation. Robert Boyle, for example, takes a positive view of curiosity, referring to the 'commendable' or 'laudable' curiosity of experimental investigators. Thirdly, in view of the fact that women did not have formal training in philosophy, curiosity has special relevance to women philosophers. However they acquired their education, they had to rely more on their native wit than their male peers. This is a point made by Mary Astell who generally had an ambivalent, if not negative view of curiosity, as in her comment that

2 Not all questioning is driven by curiosity or the desire to know. Curiosity is normally taken to be *excessive* desire to know.

3 Kenny, *Uses of Curiosity* 46.

'Curiosity which is sometimes an occasion of good, and too frequently of Mischief'.⁴ But in a comment to John Norris, she acknowledged its value for her self-education: 'I can't pretend to a Multitude of Books, Variety of Languages, and the Advantages of Academical Education or any Helps but what my own Curiosity afford'.⁵

By time-honoured tradition going back to Aristotle, and extending to the early modern period, philosophy begins with admiration or wonder (Greek *thauma*, Latin *admiratio*).⁶ In the seventeenth century admiration is sometimes coupled with, or even replaced by curiosity as the originator of philosophical enquiry, a shift which accords curiosity foundational status in philosophy which was not previously ascribed to it. In the new philosophies of the seventeenth century, curiosity is not treated as mere inquisitiveness – though it certainly has that meaning when applied to the investigations of natural philosophers known as *virtuosi*. As I shall show, early modern philosophers discuss curiosity as a passion, an intellectual passion, with the result that curiosity figures at the intersection of epistemology and ethics. The significance of this is bound up with the fact that the passions (or emotions) acquire new prominence in seventeenth-century moral philosophy.⁷ Although in Aristotle the passions are integral to a life of virtue, the renewed attention to the passions in the seventeenth century may be linked in part to a revival of interest in Stoicism, but also, especially to Descartes' *Passions de l'âme* [*Passions of the Soul*] (1649), which offered a renewed, positive view of the passions. For Descartes, the passions are intermediaries between body and soul; they play a key role achieving the good life, by enabling the soul to influence the body in order to maintain the well-being of both mind and body. The passions are therefore not negative impulses to be suppressed, but 'they are all by nature good'.⁸ The primary passion for Descartes, as it were the root of all the other passions, is Admiration. *Inter alia* this has the important intellectual function of making new knowledge stick in our memories. Another of Descartes' six primary passions is desire (*désir*), an agitation of the soul caused by the spirits, which has to do with the wish for the good which is absent, oriented to the

4 Astell Mary, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (London, William Parker: 1703) 1.

5 Astell Mary – Norris John, *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (first published 1695), eds. E.D. Taylor – M. New (Aldershot: 2005) 69.

6 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2, 982b10–18.

7 See especially James S., *Passion and Action. The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: 2000).

8 Descartes René, *Passions of the Soul*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch (eds. and trans.) (Cambridge: 1985) vol. 1, 403–404.

future.⁹ There are several kinds of desire, among them curiosity (*curiosité*), or the desire to know ('la curiosité, qui n'est autre chose qu'un désir de connaître').¹⁰ Descartes does not elaborate further on curiosity in *Les Passions de l'âme*. But the salient points are that it is a passion of the soul, and, as such, it is good. In his early *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* [*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*], Descartes is negative about the epistemological value of curiosity, unless it is applied methodically.¹¹

The seventeenth-century philosopher who accords curiosity most significance is Thomas Hobbes. Like Descartes, Hobbes links curiosity with admiration. In *Leviathan*, Book 6, Hobbes explains admiration as 'Joy' arising from 'apprehension or novelty'. Admiration 'excites the appetite of knowing the cause' [i.e. curiosity], something which men do not share with other creatures. Curiosity is 'proper to Man'.¹² As such it is the defining feature of human beings: in a prefatory letter 'To the Right Honourable Marquis of Newcastle' dating from 1646, he writes:

The passions of man's mind, except onely one, may bee observed all in other living creatures. They have desires of all sorts, love, hatred, feare, hope, anger, pitie, aemulation, and ye like; only of curiositie, which is ye desire to know ye causes of thinges, I never saw signe in any other living creature but in man. And where it is in man, I find always a defalcation or abatement for it of another passion, which in beastes is commonly praedominant, namely a ravenous qualitie, which in man is called *avarice*.

-
- 9 'La passion du désir est une agitation de l'âme causée par les esprits qui la dispose à vouloir pour l'avenir les choses qu'elle se représente être convenables. Ainsi on ne désire pas seulement la présence du bien absent, mais aussi la conservation du présent, et de plus l'absence du mal, tant de celui qu'on a déjà que de celui qu'on croit pouvoir recevoir au temps à venir', Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme* art.86 http://net.cgu.edu/philosophy/descartes/Passions_Part_Two.html (accessed 8 June 2015).
- 10 'Il y aurait plus de raison de distinguer le désir en autant de diverses espèces qu'il y a de divers objets qu'on recherche; car, par exemple, la curiosité, qui n'est autre chose qu'un désir de connaître, diffère beaucoup du désir de gloire, et celui-ci du désir de vengeance, et ainsi des autres', Descartes René, *Les Passions de l'âme* (Paris, Henry Le Gras: 1649) 395/art.88, http://net.cgu.edu/philosophy/descartes/Passions_Part_Two.html (accessed 8th June 2015). In Règle iv of his early *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* Descartes is scathing about 'blind curiosity', because it is unmethodical, advocating instead a methodical manner of investigation. Cf. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* vol. 1, 15 ff.
- 11 See Jacques-Chaquin N., "La curiosité, ou les espaces du savoir", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) t. 1, 13–32. See in this volume, Pellegrin and Martin.
- 12 Hobbes Thomas, *Leviathan* [1651], ed. N. Malcolm (Oxford: 2012), chapter 6, 86.

The desire of knowledge and desire of needlesse riches are incompatible, and destructive one of another. And therefore as in the cognitive faculties reason so in the motive curiositie, are the markes that part ye bounds of man's nature from that of beastes.¹³

As Gianni Paganini has pointed out, Hobbes's view of curiosity was not static, and the re-conception of human nature that it entailed was radical.¹⁴ Hobbes's most fully developed account of curiosity is in *Leviathan* where he distinguishes mankind from animals not simply by the traditional ascription of reason to man as a rational animal, but by virtue of his curiosity. Hobbesian man is 'animal curiosus': 'Desire to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but *Man*: so that Man is distinguished, not only by his reason, but also by this Singular Passion from other *Animals*'.¹⁵ Hobbes also makes a distinction between the superficial pursuit of knowledge, and sustained application in search of the knowledge of causes. Human curiosity is distinguished by the fact that it entails not an '*Unguided*' train of thought', without *Designe* and inconstant', but something 'more constant; as being regulated by some desire, and designe'.¹⁶ He describes curiosity in shockingly sensual terms as 'mental concupiscence', 'a Lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal Pleasure'.

The negative reception of Hobbes in seventeenth-century England makes it unlikely that his conception of curiosity was widely accepted, or, if it was, that his influence was acknowledged. But there are exceptions, one being Margaret Cavendish, many of whose pronouncements on curiosity have a Hobbesian ring. Another exception is Walter Charleton, who makes positive references to Hobbes in his *Natural History of the Passions* (1674). His account of curiosity in this work is strongly reminiscent of Hobbes. For Charleton, curiosity is appetite for knowledge which arises from admiration of things new and strange.

13 Undated letter, prefacing a draft "Treatise on Optics", which is dated 1646. Printed in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. W. Molesworth (London: 1845) 11 vols., vol. 7, "Letters and other pieces" 467.

14 Paganini G., "Passionate Thought": Reason and the Passion of Curiosity in Thomas Hobbes, in Ebbersmeyer S. (ed.), *Emotional Minds: the Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy* (Berlin – Boston: 2012) 227–256. See also Coli D., "Hobbes's Revolution", in Kahn V. – Saccamano N. – Coli D. (eds.), *Politics and the Passions, 1500–1850* (Princeton: 2006); Losonsky M., *Enlightenment and Action from Descartes to Kant: Passionate Thought* (Cambridge: 2001) 42–71. Tabb K., "The Fate of Nebuchadnezzar: Curiosity and Human Nature in Hobbes", *Hobbes Studies* 27 (2014) 13–34.

15 Hobbes, *Leviathan* 86. See also Cottagnies, *supra*.

16 Paganini, "Passionate Thought" 248.

Admiration is the first of the passions, and is common to men and beasts, 'but with this *difference*, that in *Man* it is always conjoined with *Curiosity*; in Beasts, not'. Curiosity is pleasureable ('a delight') and a calm state of mind. Charleton too emphasizes the epistemological importance of curiosity as the origin of 'all natural *Philosophy*, and *Astronomy*'.¹⁷

Not all philosophical considerations of curiosity were positive, however. Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) gives an ambivalent account of curiosity in his *Recherche de la verité* (1674–1675) book 4, chapter 3, where he discusses curiosity as one of two natural inclinations, the second being self-love.¹⁸ Like Descartes, Malebranche makes a distinction between 'admiration' and 'curiosité', and he accorded both a role in the search for knowledge: wonder stimulates curiosity which then leads to the knowledge of truth. In so far as curiosity manifests itself as a desire for moral improvement, it is to be valued. But in so far as it entails excessive desire for novelty, it diverges from the matters of substance, and is to be condemned. The fruits of bad curiosity are false and useless learning (he gives as examples the compilation of a library of dictionaries or a collection of coins). Curiosity has to be regulated in order to direct it away from new and extraordinary things to true goals.

Malebranche has particular significance in late seventeenth-century England, where *La Recherche* was published in both English and Latin translation,¹⁹ and his ideas were popularized by the philosopher John Norris, who also played a commendable part in encouraging women like Mary Astell and Mary Chudleigh to participate in intellectual life.²⁰ And it is in a letter to a philosophical woman, Damaris Masham, that his advice on managing curiosity is to be found, Norris's *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life with Reference to the Study of Learning and Knowledge: in a letter to the excellent lady, the Lady Masham*, which was published in 1690.

As the title of the book suggests, *Reflections* discusses the pursuit of learning in general. His main comments on curiosity occur in the third and last section

17 Charleton Walter, *Natural History of the Passions* (London, Thomas Newton for James Magnes: 1674) 88 and 89.

18 On Malebranche, see also Pellegrin below.

19 There were two English translations: Malebranche Nicolas, *Father Malebranche's Treatise concerning the search after truth*, trans. T. Taylor (Oxford, L. Lichfield, for Thomas Bennet: 1694) and Malebranche Nicolas, *Malebranch's Search after truth*, trans. R. Sault (London, J. Dunton: 1694). A Latin translation was also published in London in 1687 as *De inquirenda veritate* (London, Abel Swalle: 1687).

20 See *Letters*, eds. Taylor – New. Also Hutton S., *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: 2015). On Norris's philosophy, see Mander W.J., *The Philosophy of John Norris* (Oxford: 2008).

of the book. A main theme of the work in general is that knowledge and learning are to be pursued in moderation, with a moral end in view.

This therefore is the *Measure* to be observ'd in our prosecution of Learning and Knowledge. We are to *Study* only that we may be *good*, and consequently ought to prosecute such Knowledge only as has an aptness to make us so, that which the Apostle calls *the Truth, which is after Godliness*. For that's the only business we have to do in this World.²¹

All other forms of knowledge, he goes on, are worthless, even if we thereby perfect our reason. He characterizes such knowledge as vain and idle, as curiosity rather than knowledge:

Whatever Knowledge we prosecute besides this, or further than 'tis conducive to this end, tho it be *absolutely* consider'd, never so excellent and Perfective of our Rational part, yet with *respect* to the present Posture and Station of Man, 'tis a Culpable Curiosity, and an unaccountable Vanity, and only a more Solemn and laborious way of being *Idle* and *Impertinent*.²²

The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is not merely deemed curiosity, but *culpable* curiosity. Norris writes consciously from the perspective of one who has spent thirteen years at the best university in the land (Oxford) where he was acutely aware of how much academic learning was devoted to 'unconcerning curiosities', a phrasing which suggests the trivialness of the knowledge thereby acquired. His letter draws out the moral and spiritual significance of the pursuit of knowledge, by linking it with sensuality and the fall of man. Desire for knowledge is an appetite to be controlled, and not indulged.

[H]owever Naturally desirous we may be of Knowledge, yet that this Appetite [desire of knowledge] is to be govern'd as well as those that are Sensual; that we ought to indulge it only so far as may tend to the Moralizing our Souls, and the conducting our Lives, and the fitting us for that Happiness which God has promised not to the Learned, but to the Good. And that if it be gratify'd to any other purpose, or in any other Measure than this, our Curiosity is impertinent, our study immoderate, and the Tree of Knowledge still a forbidden Plant.²³

21 Norris John, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life with Reference to the Study of Learning and Knowledge* (London, s.n.: 1690) 124.

22 Norris, *Reflections* 125.

23 Norris, *Reflections* 150–151.

Underlining the link to Adam's fall, he cautions against

this Bookish Humour which every where so prevails, is one of the *Spiritual Dyscrasys*, or *Moral Diseases* of Mankind, one of the most Malignant Reliques of Original depravation. It carrying in it the very Stamp and Signature of Adam's Transgression, which owed its birth to Curiosity, and inordinate desire of Knowledge.²⁴

Rejecting the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, Norris associates it with natural philosophers, or *virtuosi* and recommends the 'Renunciation of all things curious'.²⁵

His book was not well-received by its addressee. The reason was that he offered his argument as a consolation to Lady Masham for loss of her eyesight, comforting her with the thought that she was deprived of nothing but vanity, implying that she could focus on the state of her soul without the use of her eyes. Not only was Norris misinformed about the state of her vision, but he made the unpardonable *faux pas* of making it and her name public. Masham's friend, and Norris's erstwhile acquaintance, John Locke, never forgave him.²⁶ Leaving aside Norris's blunder, his restriction of the scope of human enquiry was not calculated to please an intelligent woman like Damaris Masham, who regarded philosophy as a welcome respite from the duties of household management.²⁷

Anne Conway

Another woman for whom philosophical pursuits were fundamental was Anne Conway.²⁸ She did not write for publication – her *Principia philosophiae* appeared posthumously in 1690. Although this is more or less contemporaneous

24 Norris, *Reflections* 155.

25 Norris, *Reflections* 159.

26 Acworth R., *The Philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton: 1657–1712* (New York: 1979). Mary Astell made it a condition of Norris's publishing her letters that her authorship should remain anonymous, and that he should not even use her initials. Astell – Norris, *Letters* 66.

27 Hutton S., "Between Platonism and Enlightenment: Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 1 (1993) 29–54.

28 On Anne Conway, see Hutton S., *Anne Conway, a Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: 2004). Also Parageau S., *Les Ruses de l'ignorance: la contribution des femmes à l'avènement de la science moderne en Angleterre* (Paris: 2010).

with Norris's *Reflections*, its composition antedates it by at least 11 years.²⁹ Whether she was acquainted with Malebranche's *Recherche de la verité* which appeared five years before her death in 1679 is an open question. Although possible, it is not likely. She was, however, well-acquainted with Cartesianism, having been inducted into philosophy through epistolary tutorials on Descartes' philosophy by Henry More. And she was also familiar with the philosophy of Hobbes, whom she refutes in her *Principia*. She may also have read the writings of Walter Charleton, and she was well aware of the experimental philosophy of the Royal Society. So she would have been alert to how curiosity figures in the new philosophies of her time. The survival of a great part of her life-long correspondence with Henry More³⁰ affords a unique discursive context for her treatise shedding light on her interests and motivations – notwithstanding the fact that very few of her own letters are extant. So, although she herself does not make direct reference to curiosity, or discuss the passions of the soul, we can obtain some insight into how, in practice, women philosophers bring a positive perspective to curiosity as desire or search for knowledge. One of the striking features of the way Conway presents her philosophical views is her interrogative stance, her pursuit of issues by way of questions. This is also apparent in the more informal discursive framework of her letters. Furthermore, a number of the texts produced by members of her circle at Ragley Hall also adopt an interrogative mode – most notably Francis Mercury van Helmont's *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Revolution of Souls*.³¹ One explanation for her interrogative mode is that she conforms to the traditional philosophical practice of objections and replies. But that does not dispose of the possibility that there is more to her questioning than formal philosophical parrying, and indeed of whether and to what the extent they are driven by curiosity. These are issues which can only be addressed in the context of her writings as a whole. By examining all three groups of texts – her philosophical treatise, the writings of her circle contemporary with it, and her correspondence, we can perhaps gauge whether there is more to her questioning than the formalities of philosophising.

In the Conway circle, as one might expect, 'curiosity' could just mean 'interest' as when Henry More sends her a new book of his which may 'invite your

29 On the date of composition, see Hutton, *Anne Conway* 225–226.

30 Published as *Conway Letters*, ed. M. Nicolson in 1930, and revised by S. Hutton (Oxford: 1992).

31 Helmont Francis Mercury van, *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Revolution of Souls* (London, Rob. Kettlewell: 1684).

Ladiships curiosity to reade'.³² It could just mean inquisitiveness, the impulse to find out more. But excessive inquisitiveness was not to be encouraged in men or women. As More writes to Anne Conway, 'the thirst after knowledge is ever dangerous'. But he qualifies his caution – that it is permissible to pursue knowledge in the right religious spirit:

The thirst after knowledge is ever dangerous till the divine life has its birth in a man, and so the soul becoming divine, God in man as I may so speake examines his works over againe [...]. And then all the inquisitions after knowledge are as safe as sweet. For man then dos not so much seek himself as God, nor is tickled foolishly with pride and conceit of his knowledge, but is cary'd forth in divine joy and triumph, praying God in all his workes.³³

Unlike Norris, then, More's view was that, for a regenerate soul, the pursuit of knowledge was both legitimate and pleasureable. Anne Conway was certainly a woman who sought to make sense of the world. But she could not be described as *overly* curious. More's correspondence with her certainly testifies to her 'inquisitions after knowledge', but there is no suggestion that her desire for knowledge was excessive. And there is plenty of evidence that her pursuit of it was pious. As is apparent from her youthful letters she had an eagerness for knowledge from a young age.

The earliest surviving letters of Anne Conway's correspondence are with her father-in-law, the second Viscount Conway. These cover a range of topics including her health, astronomy, the origins of learning, poetry and drama which they had read. Young Anne's father-in-law responded positively to her appetite for knowledge, sharing his views with her. From these letters we may conclude that books are Anne's sources (e.g. Wotton), but that she reads them critically, measuring the plausibility of their claims by an appeal to experience. The ostensible reason for Viscount Conway's writing to her on this occasion was concern for his daughter's health – she was at that time receiving medical treatment from no less a physician than William Harvey, for an illness which was to afflict her for her entire life (though they did not know that then). Lord Conway extended the discussion to other things, 'because', he said, 'I

32 *Conway Letters* 228. The book in question was More's *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity* (London, J. Fleisher for W. Morden: 1664).

33 *Conway Letters* 54.

perceive your judgement is good'.³⁴ A great bibliophile and major book collector, he turned the discussion to books, offering her 'some conceptions of mine concerning new books', the authors of which break rules of tradition in one way or another – these include Ramus and Copernicus, but also 'our English Playes [which] are not written according to the rules of Antient Comedies and Tragedies'.³⁵ From the only letter by his daughter-in-law to him which survives, we can see that she could match his observations on books, drawing on those she had read in order to offer alternative opinions on writers such as Henry Wotton, George Hakewill and John Donne. In this way she made space for her own intelligent observations, not least among which was her respect for experience – she held that 'experience is the mother of all knowledge'.³⁶ Even in the case of the ancients, her respect was founded not on their authority, but their experimental (experiential) manner of gathering knowledge. Her view of the ancients was coloured by her acceptance of the then commonplace but mistaken belief in the extraordinary longevity of their lives. A consequence of their longevity was that they had plenty of time to make investigations, 'leave to make infinit experiments'.³⁷ It is a quaint thought that by virtue of their longevity the ancients could get their astronomical observations right. By contrast with the ancients, she observes:

We are forced to spend a great part of our age in attaining to the shell of Learning meere words; when as they had nothing but the kernell offered to them. They could observe the revolution of a sphaere whose circuit will not be finished in 300 year and if their first observation was deceitful, they might stay and correct it; as Doctor Dunne expresses it.

When if a low pac'd starre had ston'ne away
From the observrs marking, he might stay
Two or three hundred yeeres, to see't again
And then make up his observation plaine.³⁸

34 *Conway Letters* 31.

35 *Conway Letters* 32.

36 *Conway Letters* 37.

37 *Conway Letters* 37.

38 *Conway Letters* 37. The quotation is from Donne's *The First Anniversarie. An Anatomie of the World* (London: for Thomas Dewe, 1621).

If the young Anne Conway had a strong sense of how difficult it was to acquire basic knowledge of anything, her father-in-law was cautious about new fangled ideas. He notes that Descartes and Campanella

have written as their phantasy did perswade and done as a man must doe that goes hunting in a thicke enclosed country, leave his horse behind him and scramble over hedge and ditch and teare his cloaths, so do they leave the antient rules, and set up new opinions for the maintenance of which, they are forced to great inconveniencies, in their reason, when they are brought to the practice.³⁹

The context for this is medical knowledge, and the danger of having ‘a Physitian abound in phantasie’.⁴⁰ But Lord Conway highlights the danger of abandoning old frameworks before new ones have been established: ‘it is good to try all things and to hold that which is best, and untill experience have confirmed to suspend the assent’.⁴¹ As this comment shows, Lord Conway was not against new ideas. Nor was he against breaking the old rules – he thought English drama was the better for doing so. But his cautions highlight the fact that pushing the boundaries of knowledge, as the new philosophers of the seventeenth century did, was not without its dangers.

At around the same time as this exchange of letters with her father-in-law, Anne Conway had embarked on an exchange of letters with a new correspondent, Henry More. This correspondence is of a more formal nature, because More had been engaged as a tutor to give her lessons in philosophy. Although we do not have a complete set of this seventeenth-century example of what is now called ‘distance learning’, there is enough to show us that More took her through the works of Descartes, that he encouraged her to propose arguments and to evaluate the arguments which he proposed. While More is careful to correct misunderstandings, he was not a Cartesian dogmatist. On the contrary, he was prepared to critique Descartes, as appropriate. I have described this more fully elsewhere,⁴² but it is worth repeating the point that Anne Conway was trained in philosophical discourse, as well as the elements of Cartesianism. The formalities of objection and reply were built into her philosophical training. She was encouraged to be both logically cogent and to challenge the philosophy with which she engaged. There is nothing new about this, except the

39 *Conway Letters* 30.

40 *Conway Letters* 30.

41 *Conway Letters* 32.

42 Hutton, *Anne Conway* chapter 2.

fact that they were studying Descartes when most students of her age were studying Aristotle, and most of those were being put through highly conventional rituals of academic dispute. By contrast, the new 'Cartesian' approach was more open and informal, free of set-piece debates. The questioning involved was not designed to satisfy a thirst for knowledge, but to understand the principles and workings of a philosophical system, and the map of reality which it offered. And this correlates exactly to the way in which Conway sets about constructing her metaphysical system in her *Principia philosophiae*.

It also correlates with the terms on which she extended her correspondence with More beyond being a correspondence course in Cartesianism, to being an exchange of letters between friends who shared the same intellectual interests. Notionally theirs was a Cartesian correspondence, but in practice the topics of discussion ranged far beyond that. Even if they were still discussing Descartes,⁴³ the subjects they discussed extend to the apocalypse, enthusiasm, Quakerism, Spinoza, Boyle's experiments, and the kabbalah. It is a pretty exotic mix. But at every point, even though most of Anne Conway's letters are no longer extant, they continue to observe formalities and rules of engagement which they set up at the beginning. Their manner of proceeding is proposed by More in a letter of 1651:

As a friend I shall discuss with you what you shall be pleased to propound, but yourself must chuse according to the present Light of your own minde. For those that seek for truth in singleness and freeness of spirit, are as well to judge for themselves, as to see with their own eyes and by anothers.⁴⁴

Thus, at the time when their formal relationship of master-pupil transformed into a friendship, their continued correspondence is conducted as Lady Anne's search after truth, not in order to satisfy her thirst for knowledge. Throughout the correspondence, it is she who proposes the topic and More who responds, she who asks the questions and he who offers answers – sometimes at great length, as when propounding passages of the Book of Revelation. The basis on which they continued their epistolary discussions is the reverse of the earlier tutorial letters on Cartesian philosophy, where More set the agenda, via questions or topics to be explored. Although most of her letters have been lost, enough survive to indicate that she was not a passive recipient of More's

43 In 1658, for instance, Descartes' *Dioptrique* was the topic for discussion. See Conway *Letters* 145.

44 Conway *Letters* 54.

answers. One example concerns George Keith, the Quaker leader. She asked More to comment on Keith's book, *Immediate Revelation*,⁴⁵ which he did. Then she responded to him. Her response to his critique shows that she had already formed her own view of Keith, though glad to find More in agreement.

I think it will not be easy for him to free his opinion from those seeming absurdities, you take notice, it is entangled with, many of *which I did apprehend it to be involved with before I read what you writt* and therefore was the better pleased to find them so fully insisted on and largely expressed to my hand by so judicious and able a pen [...].⁴⁶

Nevertheless, she did not agree with More's interpretation of Keith on all points.

The longest set of questions propounded in a letter from Anne Conway to Henry More occurs in an early letter, or rather, part of a letter. For the letter, which only survives in printed form, consists of questions '*extracted out of one of her Letters*', omitting everything else. Although undated, this letter must be an early one, dating from around the time when they were corresponding about Descartes (Lady Anne starts off by proposing that they '*leave Des-Cartes for the present*'). The occasion was Anne Conway's reading of More's '*Poem of the Prae-existence of the Soul, and serious thinking of it*'. The questions are as follows:

First, Whether God did create the *Matter* for the *Enjoyment of Souls*, since they *fell* by it?

Secondly, Whether the *Soul* could Enjoy the *Matter* without being *Clothed* in Corporeity; and if it could not, how it can be the *Fall* of the *Soul* that makes it Assume a *Body*?

Thirdly, Upon Supposition most of the *Souls fell*; Why did not *all* Assume *Bodies* together: And how *Adam* can be said to be the *first Man*, and all Men to *Fall* in *him*, since they *Fell* before: And how the *Souls* of *Beasts* and *Plants* came into *Bodies*?

Fourthly, How *Man* can be *Restor'd*, to what he *Fell* from; And why the *Devils* that *Fell*; cannot? Why *Christ's* Death should Extend more to *One* than to the *Other*?⁴⁷

45 Keith George, *Immediate Revelation* ([Aberdeen, s.n.]: 1668).

46 Anne Conway to Henry More, 4th Feb 1676, *Conway Letters* 420. My italics.

47 "Important Queries proposed to the Doctor by the Right Honorable the Lady Viscountess Conway; *extracted out of one of her Letters*". First printed among "Select Letters Written

What we have here is a veritable barrage of questions, especially when presented in this format, filleted from the original letter. Clearly she was bursting with questions. They may seem an exotic mix, but they are not random questions: they are divided into four groups. But neither are they questions designed to challenge assumptions or undermine theories or floor arguments. These are questions borne of a desire to know rather than disputatiousness.

Let us turn now to her philosophy set out in her posthumously published *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae ac recentissimae*⁴⁸ – translated as *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*.⁴⁹ Although unfinished, this is no random collection of thoughts or a simple rearrangement of other people's thoughts, but the construction of a coherent system of philosophy which offers an original system of metaphysics, and challenges contemporary philosophical theories (the best-known concept being soul-body dualism). It has a clear structure, the arguments are laid out in logical progression. Its conclusions follow in strict order. It has been described as 'dogmatic'.⁵⁰

As is now well-established Conway's treatise scrutinises and questions the philosophical theories of her time. These are the 'big three', Hobbes, Descartes and Spinoza, but also their critic, Henry More. Anne Conway certainly 'pushed boundaries' by challenging their theories of the workings of nature. Strikingly she frames many of the arguments which she uses dialogically. She pursues them interrogatively. The objections, or challenges which she makes, often take the form of questions: for example her proof of the infinity of time from the goodness of God is argued by posing questions. God, she says, is an infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity, and bounty. Such a fountain must flow perpetually, otherwise there would be an interruption in his abundance, which would mean divine goodness would be finite. If God is the source of 'goodness and charity itself', she asks,

In what way is it possible for that fountain not to flow perpetually and to send forth living waters? For will not that ocean overflow in its perpetual emanation and continual flux for the production of creatures? [...]

upon Several Occasions", appended to Richard Ward's biography of Henry More, published in 1712. Modern reprint, Hutton S., "An Early Letter by Anne Conway", in Totaro P. (ed.), *Donne, filosofia e cultura nel seicento* (Rome: 1999) 109–115.

48 Conway Anne, *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae ac recentissimae* (Amsterdam, [M. Brown]: 1690).

49 Conway Anne, *The Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (London, s.n.: 1692).

50 Walker D.P., *The Decline of Hell* (London: 1964) 137–138.

[I]t necessarily follows that he gave being to creatures from time everlasting or from time without number, for otherwise the communicative goodness of God, which is his essential attribute, would indeed be finite, and could be then numbered in terms of years. Nothing is more absurd.⁵¹

Another example of Conway's interrogative manner of proceeding is the crucial matter of soul-body union in chapter 8, when she challenges the arguments of Henry More. Taking More's definitions of body and spirit according to which (in her words) 'spirit is life or a living and perceiving substance, body is indeed mere dead mass; spirit is penetrable and indiscerpible, body impenetrable and discernible' (terminology characteristic of More).⁵² Taking More's definition, she asks, '[w]hat I ask is this: what is it that joins them? or what are those chains and ties which connect them so firmly together for such a long space of time?'⁵³ She adds the further, correlative question, if body and soul are so firmly bound together that nothing can separate them, how can that union be dissolved at death? She then proceeds to demolish the answers to these questions by posing further questions – e.g. citing More's theory of 'vital congruity' which he posited to explain soul-body union:

If it is claimed that vital congruity (*congruitas vitalis*) of the soul for the body is the cause of this union and that this vital congruity ceases with the dissolution of the body, I reply that one must first ask in what does this vital congruity consist?⁵⁴

She then points out that this supposed 'vital congruity' is a contradiction of the very nature of spirit and body, because they are so dissimilar that there can be no affinity between them.

She also disposes of 'the hypothesis of those who affirm that matter cannot be changed into any degree of life or perception', by asking a veritable barrage of questions. If God is 'living goodness', she asks,

51 Conway Anne, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, trans. A.P. Coudert – T. Corse, chapter 11, section 4, 13. 'communicative goodness of God' is my translation of 'communicativa Dei bonitas'.

52 Conway, *Principles* 56. The modern English translation translates 'discerpibilis' and 'indiscerpibilis' as 'divisible' and 'indivisible', but this does not render More's meaning accurately. I have modified the English to use his terminology.

53 Conway, *Principles* VIII.1, 56.

54 Conway, *Principles* 56–57, with my modifications.

How can any dead thing proceed from him or be created by him? [...] How can a dead thing come from him that is infinite life and charity? Or how can any creature receive so vile and diminutive an essence from him [...] that it does not share any life or perception and is not able to aspire to the least degree of these for all eternity? Did not God create all his creatures to this end, namely that they be blessed in him and enjoy his divine goodness in their various conditions and states? Moreover, how could this be possible without life or perception? How can anything lacking life enjoy divine goodness?⁵⁵

And that is not the end of the questions relating to this particular point, but this is enough to illustrate the fact that Anne Conway sets about demolishing other positions by means of serious interrogation which calls attention to their shortcomings. Thus, for all the dogmatic appearance of her book, many of her arguments are structured dialogically as sets of questions and answers. One explanation is that she was simply employing a standard form of philosophical debate, the most common form of which was the disputation where questions were posed and debated *pro* and *contra*. But Conway's barrages of questions do not fit that model. Alternatively, there was the dialogic model associated with Descartes: objections and replies. What is unusual about Conway in the examples given is that most of her objections are expressed as questions to which she does not reply, and many of her own answers take the form of questions.

I have argued elsewhere that Anne Conway was a philosopher *in dialogue* with the philosophy of her time (i.e. Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and More). There is no doubt that her mode of arguing implies a dialogue. And the dialogic character of her argument is also a feature of another group of writings associated with Anne Conway and Francis Mercury van Helmont. To recap, the texts in question are *A Cabbalistical Dialogue* (1684), *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* (1677) and *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Revolution of Human Souls* (1684). Since I have discussed the relationship of these texts to Conway's *Principles* more fully elsewhere, I shall just highlight a few points. These may be considered as paratexts for *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. *Two Hundred Queries* is most closely affiliated with Conway's *Principles*, as it was also published in Latin in 1690, in the same volume as Conway's *Principia* (with the title *cc problemata*). There are, furthermore, discernible parallels between *Two Hundred Queries*, Anne Conway's *Principles* and the letters and writings of George Keith, which date from the same period. All these texts exhibit affinities in point of content and structure. Remarkably, the texts are *dialogic* in character, proceeding by way of questions.

55 Conway, *Principles* VI.2, 45.

In the case of *Two Hundred Queries*, there are only questions – the answers can be supplied by the reader, or by reference to the other texts in the group. As I have argued elsewhere, the dialogic character and content of these texts is suggestive of collective rather than single authorship, and Anne Conway might be considered as co-author of at least some of them.

Reviewing Conway's habit of questioning, there seem to be more than one kind, all of them inter-related, questions with answers, open-ended questions, barrages of questions. It is not too fanciful to suggest that, had more of her letters survived, we would have more examples of her interrogative stance. Her writings exhibit her training in objections and replies, and her practice of posing questions in the context of dialogic exchange. But they are not the kind of questions typical of formal academic disputation. Nor are they rhetorical questions, for they are questions which invite answers, or questions which are supplied with answers. They are not asked out of mere inquisitiveness, but in order to elicit or arrive at a better understanding of the subject at issue. They are not random or self-deprecating, but confident, orderly questions which challenge positions, and are structured in such a way that they open the way to conclusions about the nature of God and the order of the created world. Her methodical manner of proceeding is suggestive of the methodical or regulated curiosity of Descartes' *Règles*. If curiosity is the desire to know the causes of things, as Hobbes defined it, it is safe to say that Anne Conway's questions exhibit curiosity. That does not, of course, make her a Hobbist. But it does situate her within a philosophical culture where curiosity was engaged in reconfiguring the world. In this sense, Anne Conway was certainly motivated by a *desire* to know, and to that extent 'curiosity' was a driver in her thinking. But her desire was not for knowledge for its own sake, or even for her own self improvement (as Norris might have it). Conway's quest was for a philosophical understanding of the world compatible with the truth of God. Her questions are directed to that end, exemplifying curiosity in practice. This is the curiosity of truth seekers, who are, in More's afore quoted phrase, 'those that seek for truth in singleness and freeness of spirit'.⁵⁶

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Astell Mary, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (London, William Parker: 1703).

⁵⁶ Conway Letters 54. See above at footnote 25.

- , *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695), eds. E.D. Taylor – M. New (Aldershot: 2005).
- Charleton Walter, *Natural History of the Passions* (London, T.N. for James Magnes: 1674).
- Conway Anne, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1692), trans. A.P. Coudert – T. Corse (Cambridge: 1996).
- , *The Conway Letters*, eds. M. Nicolson – S. Hutton (Oxford: 1992).
- Descartes René, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, eds. and trans. J. Cottingham – R. Stoothoff – D. Murdoch (Cambridge: 1985).
- , *Les Passions de l'âme*. URL: http://net.cgu.edu/philosophy/descartes/Passions_Letters.html (accessed 8 June 2015).
- Hobbes Thomas, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. W. Molesworth (London: 1845) 11 vols.
- , *Leviathan* [1651], ed. N. Malcolm (Oxford: 2012).
- Norris John, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life with Reference to the Study of Learning and Knowledge* (London, S. Manship: 1690).

Secondary Sources

- Acworth R., *The Philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton: 1657–1712* (New York: 1979).
- Hutton S., *Anne Conway, a Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: 2004).
- , “An Early Letter by Anne Conway”, in Totaro P. (ed.), *Donne, filosofia e cultura nel seicento* (Rome: 1999) 109–115.
- James S., *Passion and Action. The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: 2000).
- Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).
- , *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe. Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: 1998).
- Paganini G., “‘Passionate Thought’: Reason and the Passion of Curiosity in Thomas Hobbes”, in Ebbersmeyer S. (ed.), *Emotional Minds: the Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy* (Berlin – Boston: 2012) 227–256.
- Parageau S., *Les Ruses de l'ignorance: la contribution des femmes à l'avènement de la science moderne en Angleterre* (Paris: 2010).

Female Curiosity and Male Curiosity about Women: The Views of the Cartesian Philosophers

Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin
(trans. Peter Thomas)

According to the entry on ‘curiosité’ in Furetière’s 1690 *Dictionnaire universel*, there are two types of curiosity, good and bad. Furetière is echoing here centuries of opposition between two traditions. On the one hand the Aristotelian tradition¹ generally sets great store by curiosity, as reflected in the first line of the *Metaphysics* and its celebrated assertion: ‘All men desire naturally to know’.² On the other hand, the Augustinian tradition links curiosity to the concept of Original Sin and by extension to all forms of *libido sciendi*, and it therefore stands condemned.³ Clearly there are various nuances and specificities to be taken into account in considering this opposition. Whatever tradition one is associated with, curiosity is nonetheless a natural intellectual attitude that no philosopher can reject out of hand. It reflects a legitimate desire not to remain ignorant. How then can a firm distinction be drawn between good curiosity and bad? Is this distinction meaningful?

-
- 1 This tradition is clearly reflected in Marin Cureau de la Chambre when he writes that ‘the Virtue that governs our desires in their search may be termed Study or praiseworthy Curiosity’ (‘la Vertu qui regle nos désirs dans leur recherche se peut appeler Estude ou Curiosité louable’) (*L’Art de connoistre les hommes* (Amsterdam, Chez Jacques Le Jeune: 1660–1669) Part 1, 225). Moral qualities are essentially analysed here as a correct attitude between two contrary faults, in line with Aristotelian ethics. Note that ‘the curious person’ represents a halfway house between ‘the investigative person’ and ‘the negligent person’, and that its synonym is ‘the studious person’ (Cureau de la Chambre, *L’Art de connoistre les hommes* 228).
 - 2 ‘Tous les hommes désirent naturellement savoir’, Aristote (Aristotle), *Métaphysique* (*Metaphysics*), trans. J. Tricot (Paris: 1986) A, I, 980a21.
 - 3 Augustin (St. Augustine), *Confessions*, x, xxxv, 54, ed. L. Jerphagnon, trans. P. Cambronne (Paris: 1998) vol. 1: ‘there is, in the soul, another form of covetousness. While using the same bodily senses, this hollow and greedy curiosity seeks, not to charm the flesh, but to turn it into an instrument of experience: knowledge, science, these are the names it assumes’. (‘Il existe, dans l’âme, une autre forme de convoitise. Tout en utilisant les mêmes sens corporels, cette creuse et avide curiosité vise, non pas à charmer la chair, mais à en faire un instrument d’expérience: connaissance, science, voilà les noms dont elle s’affuble’) 1017.

It is worth noting first of all that maintaining this distinction means, for most thinkers of the classical age, differentiating between objects that are worthy of curiosity or not. This is the most certain way in which limits can be imposed on curiosity. Authors of this period also consider the motives behind people's curiosity, i.e. the faculties that are at work in the curious mind.

Once these two parameters have been explicitly established as a way of differentiating between types of curiosity (in terms of objects, or in terms of motives), the question arises as to whether they apply to women. Where women are concerned, however, there is a noticeable change in the issues raised. Behind the distinction between good and bad curiosity lies in fact a more general problem, that of women's knowledge in the seventeenth century. The figure of the curious woman sharply focuses attention on the capacity and legitimacy of all individuals, both women and men, to obtain knowledge. Philosophical analyses of women's curiosity lead to a shift in the traditional frontiers between good and bad curiosity. It soon becomes clear that there is a significant difference in approach between the moralists on the one hand and the Cartesians on the other.

Objects of Curiosity

All the moralistically and theologically inspired literature of the period seems to be in agreement on one point: women should not be too curious. In the case of women, curiosity always seems to be tainted with a fault. Either women's curiosity is ridiculous (Molière's women scholars and *précieuses* losing sleep in their efforts to observe the stars), or it is disordered (curious women in this case step out of the position they have been assigned by society, by becoming involved in science or theology at the expense of their household concerns). This is the argument put forward for example by André Rivet when Anna Maria van Schurman calls for girls of noble birth to be allowed access to the sciences.⁴

4 Van Schurman Anna-Maria – Rivet André, *Question célèbre s'il est nécessaire ou non que les filles soient savantes* (Paris, Rolet le Duc: 1646) 49: 'In fact, do you not remain in a way in agreement with my proposal, whether when I exclude women from research in the sciences, I only mean those who the cares of a household and domestic affairs necessarily embarrass and occupy? Now you know that the majority of the members of your sex have no other exercise than that one'. ('En effet, ne demeurez-vous pas en quelque sorte d'accord de ma proposition, si lorsque j'exclus les femmes de la recherche des sciences, j'entends seulement parler de celles que le soin d'un ménage et des affaires domestiques embarrasse et occupe nécessairement? Or vous savez que la plus grande partie de votre sexe, n'a point d'autre exercice que celui-là'.)

But if women's curiosity is so often linked to vanity and indiscretion, this is because it is allegedly directed at the wrong objects. The distinction between good and bad curiosity thus seems to depend essentially on its objects. This is demonstrated in the argumentative twists and turns of Fénelon in his *Traité de l'éducation des filles*.⁵ He points out that it is generally held that girls should not 'be too knowledgeable, curiosity makes them vain and precious'.⁶ But this indicates a failure to understand the moral damage caused by ignorance: 'Women who are poorly educated and do not apply themselves have an imagination that is always wandering. For lack of solid sustenance, their curiosity turns ardently towards vain and dangerous objects',⁷ such as novels, and more generally diversions and entertainments. The mind is indeed naturally curious, but it is not advisable to let the imagination decide at which objects it should be directed. It can thus be concluded that the natural and spontaneous character of curiosity is in itself a justification for educating girls in the same way as boys: 'children's curiosity is a tendency in nature, which is the precursor of education'.⁸ It is significant that in this third chapter, Fénelon refers to the two sexes without distinction when he gives his advice on the right ways in which to feed children's curiosity.

Later in Fénelon's treatise, however, there is a change in the distinctions drawn between objects of curiosity: it is no longer just a matter of bad and good objects; instead amongst the good objects there are those that are suitable for girls and those that are unsuitable. Generally speaking, up to this point in the treatise, vain objects of curiosity were mainly a matter for girls, largely because they were brought up in ignorance, but could in fact attract a child of either gender. It was not so much that girls' curiosity was different from that of boys, but rather that – as it had been denied solid sustenance – it was guided towards bad objects. From chapter six onwards however, Fénelon's differentiation between objects becomes clearly gender-related. This is particularly significant when it comes to religious education: 'it is essential to enter very soberly into these types of discourse for girls. I am only proposing them here for those whose curiosity *and reasoning* would lead you despite yourself

5 See Martin's chapter in this volume, below.

6 'soient trop savantes, la curiosité les rend vaines et précieuses'. Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *De l'éducation des filles* [1687], ed. J. Le Brun (Paris: 1983) I, 91.

7 'Les filles mal instruites et inappliquées ont une imagination toujours errante. Faute d'aliment solide, leur curiosité se tourne toute avec ardeur vers des objets vains et dangereux' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* II, 95).

8 'La curiosité des enfants est un penchant de la nature, qui va comme au-devant de l'instruction' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* III, 100). All translations from the French by this translator.

to these questions,'⁹ writes Fénelon. The inflexion is clear. It is best to avoid girls asking themselves questions about theological matters. However there is another point here that merits closer examination.

Fénelon does indeed say that, despite everything, there are cases in which girls' curiosity goes hand-in-hand with reasoning and that the educator must take this into account. This observation (albeit made in passing) explicitly breaks the link between curiosity and undesirable leanings that are more specifically female (idleness, ignorance, pernicious sensitivity, vanity, etc.¹⁰) and proposes another link, between curiosity and reason. Women's curiosity can be stimulated by reason, and a good pedagogue should not ignore the fact.¹¹ Indeed, this should be his very purpose: he must elicit a 'reasonable curiosity'¹² in his pupil. This possibility is crucially important, for it suggests a type of curiosity could exist that is not 'disordered',¹³ i.e. directed towards bad objects.

But how is the object of curiosity formed? What makes it appear curious? An object arouses curiosity because it stands out in stark contrast to other objects. And the two criteria most commonly found in the literature and philosophy of the time as defining an object of curiosity are rarity and novelty. Each of these qualities means that an object distinguishes itself, and breaks with the perceptive habits of the individual and thus activates his or her natural desire for knowledge. These two qualities are self-sufficient, and exclude any axiological considerations about objects that thus attract attention. La Bruyère stresses for example that 'curiosity is not a taste for that which is good or beautiful, but for that which is rare, unique'.¹⁴ The absence of moral value in the attitude of curiosity and the lack of axiological significance in the object of curiosity explain why it is possible to distinguish between good and bad curiosity *per se*. Only the nature of the object seems to make this possible.

This view is underpinned by the fact that, even amongst writers influenced by St. Augustine, curiosity is not condemned *per se*. Malebranche¹⁵ thus

9 'Il faut entrer fort sobrement dans ces sortes de discours pour les filles. Je ne les propose ici que pour celles dont la curiosité *et le raisonnement* vous mèneraient malgré vous jusqu'à ces questions' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* VII, 131). Our italics.

10 See Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles*, Chap. II.

11 The pedagogue should for instance teach Latin 'to girls of sound judgement', a 'more reasonable' study than that of Spanish or Italian, for it is 'the language of the church' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* XII, 163).

12 'curiosité raisonnable' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* IX, 147).

13 'dérégulée' (Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles*, IX, 147).

14 'La curiosité n'est pas un goût pour ce qui est bon ou ce qui est beau, mais pour ce qui est rare, unique'. La Bruyère Jean de, *Les Caractères* (Paris: 1975), "De la mode" 2, vi, 311.

15 On Malebranche, see also Hutton's chapter in this volume.

considers curiosity to be the first of man's natural inclinations, and presents it as 'natural'.¹⁶ As it is aroused only by certain types of objects – those which are rare, extraordinary or new – curiosity needs to be guided. It is thus the axiological neutrality of curiosity, a natural impulse of man, that makes moral discourse necessary, in order that it may be directed towards the correct objects. For in Malebranche's description, it is the natural (i.e. spontaneous) character of curiosity which means that efforts to stifle it would be vain. It constitutes a form of 'inquiétude', in the positive sense that this term was taking on in the philosophy in this period,¹⁷ which is a fundamental part of human nature. Man's interest is aroused by new and extraordinary things, and were it not for this fundamental curiosity, there would be no way of acquiring knowledge and advancing in the search for truth: 'it is therefore fitting that men should be excited by novelty'.¹⁸

A distinction must however be drawn between the rare object and the new object. For most of the Cartesian thinkers, the rare object is associated with the obsolete figures of science that should be denounced. The scholastic man of learning and the Renaissance scholar seek objects that are rare in the sense that they are commonly unperceived. Their goal is to maintain esoteric knowledge, inaccessible to common sense because entirely constructed using obscure concepts that are incapable of describing reality. Malebranche refers to the example of the astronomers, and of those who 'spend their lives reading rabbis, and other books written in foreign, obscure and corrupted languages', ('passent toute leur vie à lire des rabbins, et d'autres livres écrits dans les langues étrangères, obscures et corrompues') in order to feel themselves to be 'greater and more elevated' than those who ignore these languages, their purpose being to be looked on as 'rare men'.¹⁹ Through their interest in rare objects, these men constitute for themselves a curiosity that is useless in terms of advancing human knowledge.

The new object however, provided that it is philosophical and not theological, is highly valued by Malebranche, for defending novelty amounts to

16 Men have 'a secret inclination for everything that bears the character of newness and extraordinariness' ('une secrète inclination pour tout ce qui porte le caractère du nouveau et de l'extraordinaire'), Malebranche Nicolas, *De la recherche de la vérité* [1674] IV, III, I, I, ed. G. Rodis-Lewis (Paris: 1979) 404. This is also the case for St. Augustine, but most of the Augustinian traditions tended in the seventeenth century to stress moralistic considerations on 'vain curiosity'.

17 See Alquié F., *Le Cartésianisme de Malebranche* (Paris: 1974) 384 ff.

18 'Il est donc juste que les hommes soient excités par la nouveauté' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 405).

19 'Des hommes rares' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 426).

defending the 'new philosophy' of this period, that is Cartesianism. For the Cartesians, because of their proselytising mission for the new philosophy, the rare can be seen to be dissociated from the new. The latter is positive and the search for the new is necessary for the advancement of science.²⁰

In all these passages from Malebranche about good and bad curiosity, the question of women is not explicitly raised. The reason for this is quite simple. Fundamentally for Malebranche, the problem of curiosity is the problem of science, and the problem of the choice of a figure of science. And women do not form part of this process: 'enough has been spoken about women and children: it is not their business to seek the truth and to educate others in it', he writes in what appears to be a definitive judgement in *De la recherche de la vérité*.²¹ Here, bad curiosity seems to be the preserve of a category of scholars that is entirely male. For the condemnation of curiosity is essentially a condemnation of curious sciences and obscure knowledge that turn people away from common sense. Women cannot be described as having this type of curiosity, since they have been assigned to the category of the ignorant (and indeed this is why they are often bundled together with children).

Taking his lead from Descartes, Malebranche thus sees the curious person primarily as a type of scholar that represents the opposite of the Cartesian vision of knowledge. In *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, a text which, although unpublished at the time, laid the foundation of a new vision of science and of the method by which it could be attained in modern times, Descartes denounced men who were 'prey to a blind curiosity' ('les proies d'une aveugle curiosité'). This curiosity is linked to the rarity of its objects and is thus linked to the so-called curious sciences, because Descartes denounces here – in addition to the intellectual attitude of certain geometers and philosophers – the chemists.²² It is also linked to the lack of method in intellectual investigation into these objects. By following 'unknown paths' ('chemins inconnus'), the minds of such people can only, at best, discover truth by chance; they wander

20 'In theological matters, one must love antiquity, because one must love truth, and truth is to be found in antiquity. But in philosophical matters, one must on the contrary love novelty, for the same reason that one must always love truth, that one must seek it, that one must constantly be curious about it'. ('En matière de théologie, on doit aimer l'antiquité, parce qu'on doit aimer la vérité, et que la vérité se trouve dans l'antiquité. Mais en matière de philosophie on doit au contraire aimer la nouveauté, par la même raison qu'il faut toujours aimer la vérité, qu'il faut la rechercher, et qu'il faut avoir sans cesse de la curiosité pour elle'), Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 222.

21 'C'est assez de parler des femmes et des enfants: ils ne se mêlent pas de rechercher la vérité et d'en instruire les autres' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 202).

22 Descartes René, *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, ed. F. Alquié (Paris: 1963) 3 vols, vol. I, 91.

('vagabondent'); their research is disordered ('désordonnées') and their meditations are obscure.²³ Descartes points out, at the start of *Discours de la méthode*, that he himself has studied sciences 'that are considered to be the most curious and the most rare'.²⁴ But rare objects are in reality non-existent objects that steer us away from the only science that is important, the science of oneself.

Malebranche takes up this theme and develops it at length with a critique of various types of false scholars, such as men of learning, etymologists and astronomers. Denouncing for example 'expérimentateurs' of all kinds, the author lists their faults. The second fault is 'that they tend to focus on curious and extraordinary experiments rather than those that are most common'.²⁵ In short, bad curiosity is the curiosity of all those he places in the category of 'false scholars' ('faux savants'). The false scholar is the one who is not capable of distinguishing his daydreams from the 'sciences that are the most necessary for him, either to guide him as a man of culture or to perfect his reason'.²⁶

At this stage of the reasoning, it therefore seems impossible to associate women with bad curiosity from the Cartesian viewpoint. As curiosity is directed towards rare objects, the lack of education of girls prevents all links with the scholarly caste for whom rare objects are meat and drink. The intellectual disqualification of women in Malebranche thus seems in effect to eliminate the moralistic theme of the misplaced curiosity of women. If they do not become involved in the search for truth, their curiosity does not seem to be of any consequence.

The Faculties of Curiosity

When he studies the imaginative faculty however, Malebranche turns his attention to an analysis of how women establish that an object is rare. It seems in fact that curiosity chooses a particular type of object on the basis of the faculty that has aroused it. There is a transition from an understanding of curiosity in terms of its objects to an understanding of curiosity on the basis of the faculty

23 Descartes, *Règles*, vol. I, 91.

24 'qu'on estime les plus curieuses et les plus rares' (Descartes René, *Discours de la méthode*, ed. Adam – Tannery (Paris: 1964–1975) 11 vols., VI, 4–5).

25 'qu'ils s'arrêtent plutôt à des expériences curieuses et extraordinaires qu'à celles qui sont les plus communes' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 241).

26 'sciences qui lui sont les plus nécessaires, soit pour le conduire en honnête homme, soit pour perfectionner sa raison' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 429).

that excites it. It is thus necessary to consider the second parameter, that of motives, i.e. the causes that trigger curiosity. Women, Malebranche argues, are generally guided by their imagination.

The imaginative power of women is linked to physiological properties. Their brain is softer than that of men, and its fibres are more delicate, which makes it more receptive to the striking impressions it takes in. The viewing of any dangerous scene is therefore dangerous. Because women's imagination is extremely sensitive (i.e. strongly affected by the vividness of certain information supplied by the senses), it is easily clouded by astonishing objects. It is in fact Malebranche's thinking on the imagination that enables an understanding of the specific characteristics of women's curiosity, a theme which is not developed in the author's chapters explicitly relating to curiosity,²⁷ because, as demonstrated earlier, they are focused on the curiosity of scholars. Women's curiosity stands out because their imagination is marked by vivid impressions in a strong or even indelible way. In the chapters dealing with the imagination, which develop wide-ranging psycho-physiological reflections, women and their curiosity play a fundamental role. And the role played by women's curiosity is even more significant as it is referred to in passages specifically about diseases of the imagination which make it contagious. Women's curiosity helps to explain at least two essential facts.

First, it provides an explanation for Original Sin and its transmission. Eve, the archetype of bad curiosity, is jointly responsible for Original Sin. In the Augustinian tradition, Malebranche considers that all mankind has inherited this initial sin. Transmission has taken place, in Malebranche's view, by imaginative contagion from the brain of each mother to her foetus.²⁸ A psycho-physiological hypothesis (imaginative communication between the brain of the mother and her child *in utero*) explains a theological truth (the transmission of Original Sin from one generation to the next). The specific features of the woman's brain and the brain of the foetus, i.e. their capacity to be easily and deeply affected by strong images (the marks of concupiscent), explain why the imaginative faculty is so greatly developed in women. The woman is powerfully and sometimes durably affected by objects that are astonishing and tangible.

Women's imagination then becomes the explanation for physical and/or psychological defects in the new-born child. Once again Malebranche attributes the deformity to imaginative contagion from the mother to the foetus. The mother is affected by a vivid image, and passes on the trace of the image to her

27 In Book IV, Chapter III and following of *De la recherche de la vérité*.

28 Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 185 ff.

embryo, who can directly receive the marks of this image in its body, through its extremely malleable brain. In this respect, curiosity exerts its full impact, as demonstrated by the example chosen by Malebranche.

About seven or eight years ago, there was seen at Les Incurables a young man who was born insane, and whose body was broken in the same places as the bodies of criminals are broken [...]. Several persons saw him, and the late Queen Mother on a visit to the hospital was curious to see him, and even to touch the arms and legs of this young man at the places in which they were broken.

According to the principles that I have just established, the cause of this lamentable accident was that, his mother having learnt that a criminal was to be broken, she went to see him executed. All the blows meted out to this wretch had a forceful impact on the mother's imagination, and by a kind of recoil on the tender and delicate brain of her child.²⁹

We thus have the portrait of two curious women contemplating two wretches: the pregnant woman who inflicts through imaginative communication the sight of the criminal whose bones are broken to her foetus; the Queen Mother who, a few years later, asks to see the unfortunate foetus, now grown up, at the Hospice des Incurables. Motivated by a desire to contemplate a rare and extraordinary object, women's imagination can have devastating consequences on other people's bodies and minds.

If curiosity in women is a fault, this is because it is triggered and sustained by imagination. A curious woman can thus be seen as a sort of new Eve, who is always liable to allow herself to be subjugated by her whims. What is important is not the object that attracts attention, but the disposition of the mind in which this attraction takes place. Accordingly, an extremely pious pregnant woman who contemplates a portrait of Saint Pius, i.e. a manifestly good object, may give birth to a child with an oblong head, resembling the mitre of the saint

29 'Il y a environ sept ou huit ans, que l'on voyait aux Incurables un jeune homme qui était né fou, et dont le corps était rompu dans les mêmes endroits, dans lesquels on rompt les criminels [...]. Plusieurs personnes l'ont vu, et la feue Reine mère allant visiter cet hôpital eut la curiosité de le voir, et même de toucher les bras et les jambes de ce jeune homme aux endroits où ils étaient rompus. Selon les principes que je viens d'établir, la cause de ce funeste accident fut, que sa mère ayant su qu'on allait rompre un criminel, l'alla voir exécuter. Tous les coups que l'on donna à ce misérable, frappèrent avec force l'imagination de cette mère, et par une espèce de contrecoup le cerveau tendre et délicat de son enfant' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 178).

she had been fervently contemplating, in other words to a monster: 'his mother had shaped him by the force of her imagination', ('sa mère l'avait formé par la force de son imagination'), giving him an 'extraordinary' face.³⁰ This example is then rammed home with a second almost identical case a few pages later: a mother 'enflamed to the love of God' ('excitée à l'amour de Dieu') whom she associates with the image of an old man, gives birth to a child with the features of an elderly man.³¹ The image is always an image (and not an idea), and as the product of fantasy, it is necessarily bad.

Curiosity can thus stem from two contrary sources: reason and imagination. The second parameter (the cause of the curiosity and thus of the faculty that it mobilises) overlaps with the first parameter (the type of the object of curiosity), as – depending on the faculty that generates curiosity – the objects perceived as interesting are not the same. In point of fact, objects of curiosity point to the faculty that shapes them. Curiosity is a good thing, and leads towards good objects, if it is triggered by reason; the opposite is true if curiosity is triggered by the imagination. More fundamentally however, it is not the object that is the important thing, but the faculty that is focused on the object, and Malebranche makes this very clear each time he talks about women.

His psycho-physiological explanations seem to shackle women by assigning to them a nature in which their curiosity is necessarily driven by the wrong faculty. But no Cartesian can wholly renege on the first sentence of *Discours de la méthode*. If common sense is the thing in the world that is divided most equally, it is not possible to argue that no woman can be driven by 'reasonable curiosity', to use the words of Fénelon referred to earlier. Thus, 'there are some women who have more solid minds than certain men' ('il se trouve des femmes qui ont plus de solidité d'esprit que quelques hommes') for reasons related to the size, the agitation of animal spirits, and the texture of the fibres of the brain they run through when the fibres carry images that have impinged on the senses. Malebranche thus adds some nuance to his earlier analyses by asserting that 'there are scholarly women, courageous women, women capable of anything'.³² This remains however a nuance in the writings of Malebranche, as the contours of his thought are clear: 'When we attribute some faults to a sex, at certain ages, under certain conditions, we mean this only under ordinary conditions, and always assuming that there is no general rule without an

30 Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 180.

31 Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 190.

32 'Il y a des femmes savantes, des femmes courageuses, des femmes capables de tout' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 201).

exception'.³³ The scholarly woman (and here – for once in the second half of the seventeenth century – the term 'femme savante' is clearly not pejorative) is an exception, but she exists.

Towards Ungendered Curiosity

Through their vision of science and of the ways this vision can be attained, the Cartesians enable a different approach to women's curiosity, which can now be looked on as legitimate and well directed. If curiosity is a natural inclination of the human mind, and if bad curiosity is the curiosity of false scholars, does it not follow that a new space has been opened up, that of a good curiosity – the curiosity of the 'ignorant' – amongst whom women play a leading role? The fact that women are absent from Malebranche's chapters on curiosity should thus be interpreted as a positive sign. What Malebranche demonstrates is that the moralistic denunciation of women's curiosity is too topical, and ultimately explains little, as it lacks psycho-physiological foundations and reflection about what science really is. Only if these dimensions are taken into account is it possible to decide whether women are capable of playing a role in science. It is important to understand the way in which the imagination is affected by objects of curiosity, while asserting that reason can form new objects for the natural curiosity of each man or woman.

The analyses of the Cartesian thinker François Poulain de la Barre are crucial in this respect. His *De l'éducation des dames* (1674) contains a dialogue between several characters with a variety of educational backgrounds, who thus represent various types of science at different stages. Stasimaque and Sophie are true scholars, since they have followed the Cartesian method. Timandre is young man who has studied scholastics and is thus brimful of prejudice and false knowledge. Eulalie is a girl who has been deprived of the possibility of studying because of her gender, but wishes to learn. It is Eulalie who is presented as exemplifying women's curiosity. She wonders first about the suspicion of a *libido sciendi*, 'source of vanity and pride', a reproach directed at women who ask questions. But she attributes this reproach to 'savants populaires' i.e. to the false scholars who are denounced by all Cartesian thinkers.³⁴ To oppose

33 'Quand nous attribuons quelques défauts à un sexe, à certains âges, à certaines conditions, nous ne l'entendons que pour l'ordinaire, en supposant toujours, qu'il n'y a point de règle générale sans exception' (Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* 201).

34 See our article: "La science parfaite. Savants et savantes chez Poulain de la Barre", *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3 (2013) 377–392.

this approach she advocates 'the science that we seek that has no other purpose but to guide reason, and no other foundation but pure and sincere love of the truth'.³⁵ This quest for knowledge is belittled by Timandre, who is ridden by prejudice, and who describes it as vain women's curiosity,³⁶ thus enabling Eulalie to present a new theory of curiosity.

The theory is interesting for two reasons: a) it seriously weakens the concept of bad curiosity and b) it turns curiosity into an ungendered necessity. All curiosity is good and it is moreover good for everyone. It is a mistake to fall into the 'error of those who believe that curiosity is a fault and who accuse our sex of it',³⁷ says Eulalie. It is permissible to 'want to know everything'.³⁸ Curiosity is defined as the dominant desire of the mind aiming at knowledge that contributes to its perfection. Curiosity is therefore both natural (it belongs to the order of needs) and necessary (without it the mind withers away). From this it follows that curiosity is common to the whole human race.

The opposition between good and bad curiosity, although it is now no longer based on differences between the sexes, does however seem to persist in Poulain's arguments. Curiosity may be bad, like all inclinations, argues Stasimaque, who is the mouthpiece for Poulain's own view in *De l'éducation des dames*. It can be ruinous ('ruineuse'), indiscreet ('indiscrète'), overhasty ('précipitée') or boldly adventurous ('téméraire'). It can make us importunate ('importuns') and unsociable ('incommodes').³⁹ Poulain advocates, in opposition to this first type of curiosity, an 'innocent' curiosity, i.e. that is contrary neither to prudence nor justice.

The example given to illustrate bad curiosity is that of an investigation of Christian dogma (Providence and divine omnipotence), for it transcends the capacities of the human mind. One thus seems to return to the distinction between good and bad objects.⁴⁰ It is no longer just the minds of girls whose

35 'La science que nous recherchons qui n'a pour but que la conduite de la raison, et pour fondement que l'amour pur et sincère de la vérité' (Poulain de la Barre François, *De l'égalité des deux sexes; De l'éducation des dames; De l'excellence des hommes*, ed. M.-F. Pellegrin (Paris: 2011) 225).

36 'I would fear greatly, said Timandre, laughing, that this love in you should not rather be a movement of curiosity'. ('Je craindrais fort, dit Timandre en riant, que cet amour ne soit plutôt en vous un mouvement de curiosité.') Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 225.

37 'Erreur de ceux qui croient que la curiosité est un défaut et qui en accusent notre sexe' (Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 225).

38 'vouloir connaître tout' (Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 225).

39 Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 226.

40 Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 226.

desire for knowledge in this field must be calmed (as in Fénelon's view), but all minds.

The aim here however is to once again denounce the curiosity of the false scholars – who fail to come up with any definite scientific results – just as Malebranche denounced it at the same period. Women on the contrary represent an absolute form of beneficial ignorance. Bad curiosity does not apply to them. The female mind in Poulain exemplifies the Cartesian desire for a *tabula rasa*, without any prejudice resulting from a falsely scientific education which obscures the mind with abstruse concepts that are of no practical use for understanding reality.

More fundamentally, the meaning of the demonstration must be reassessed in the light of the second example, that of black magic. Poulain argues that black magic should not be condemned *per se*, provided that it does not give rise to any illegal practices. In his view, therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to direct one's curiosity towards demonic science. The example, which is controversial and indeed provocative, alludes to a whole body of critique of curiosity, and particularly of women's curiosity. Black magic is after all the science – the curious science *par excellence* – of witches, the acme of a diabolical *libido sciendi* in which women are well represented and indeed excel.⁴¹

Poulain makes his position clear: the difference between good and bad curiosity is not a difference in their objects. Demons *per se* are not an object of curiosity in a negative sense. The difference consists rather in a capacity or incapacity to consider the object with order and method, which amounts to saying that it is reason that must guide the natural tendency towards curiosity. We return here in fact to the Cartesian imperative of the *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*. Curiosity is a necessity of science, and it is fruitful when it is governed by a method.

This veritable science is the science of ourselves (a view shared by all Cartesian thinkers), and it is this, Poulain says, which constitutes the 'most curious' science.⁴² In the preface to *De l'excellence des hommes*, Poulain presents the question of women as the 'most curious' question in all of human wisdom.⁴³ Accordingly, knowledge of oneself must in fact be the main object of curiosity, or its exclusive object, for the science of ourselves contains all the

41 See Jacques-Chaquin N., "La passion des sciences interdites: curiosité et démonologie (xv^e–xviii^e siècles)", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) 2 vols, vol. 1, 73–108.

42 'la science la plus curieuse' (Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 256).

43 'la plus curieuse de toute la sagesse humaine' (Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 297).

sciences.⁴⁴ The most curious object of this science of curiosity is the question of the equality of the sexes, for all the analyses of this question will increase the sum total of human knowledge by contagion.⁴⁵ This dual conclusion profoundly modifies conceptions of curiosity. The sciences of curiosity become transformed into a single science of curiosity, which is the most fundamental and central of all. The object of curiosity is no longer that which is rare, but that which is accurate and precise. The object of curiosity is the relations between men and women, which are extraordinary in that they are profoundly inequalitarian. They must astonish reason and compel it to question the origin of the inequality and its causes, by starting out from self-knowledge: an object of curiosity thus lays the foundation of the true science of curiosity.

In moralist literature, the scholarly woman was something of a curiosity. This is how La Bruyère presented her: 'one considers a scholarly woman as one considers a fine weapon: she is artfully chiselled, admirably polished and crafted with utmost skill; she is an exhibit for a cabinet, that one shows to the curious'.⁴⁶ The fact that a woman who is not ignorant should be an astonishing object, of a type that one would consign to a case of curiosities, should trigger curiosity and elicit amazement. How can women be scholarly in an intellectual environment that is profoundly hostile to their emancipation? The scholarly woman is indeed still a curiosity, or an exception, as Malebranche said. But the education of reason can make curiosity methodical, suggests Poulain. By being curious about themselves, and about their own bodies and minds, women can

44 Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 239.

45 Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* 297: 'the question whereby one examines if they [women] are equal to men, must also be called the great question, as there is perhaps no other more important, more extensive or more curious in the whole of human wisdom. It concerns all judgements and all the conduct of men towards women, and of women towards men, and of women amongst themselves. One can not deal with it properly without everything most solid in the sciences, and it is useful in deciding many other curious questions, principally in Morality, Jurisprudence, Theology and Politics'. ('la question où l'on examine si elles [les femmes] sont égales aux hommes, doit aussi être appelée la belle question, n'y en ayant peut-être pas de plus importante, de plus étendue ni de plus curieuse dans toute la sagesse humaine. Elle regarde tous les jugements et toute la conduite des hommes à l'égard des femmes, des femmes à l'égard des hommes, et des femmes mêmes entre elles. On ne la peut bien traiter sans ce qu'il y a de plus solide dans les sciences, et elle sert à décider de quantité d'autres questions curieuses, principalement dans la Morale, la Jurisprudence, la Théologie et la Politique.')

46 'On regarde une femme savante comme on fait une belle arme: elle est ciselée artistement, d'une polissure admirable et d'un travail fort recherché; c'est une pièce de cabinet, que l'on montre aux curieux'. (La Bruyère, "Des femmes" 49, vii, 72).

discover the foundations of true science, of new science. By discovering the equality of the sexes, men too can become true scholars. Women's curiosity and curiosity about the feminine thus go hand in hand.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Aristotle, *Métaphysique*, trans. J. Tricot (Paris: 1986).
- Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. L. Jerphagnon, trans. P. Cambronne (Paris: 1998).
- Cureau de la Chambre Marin, *L'Art de connoistre les hommes* (Amsterdam, Chez Jacques Le Jeune: 1660–1669).
- Descartes René, *Discours de la méthode*, ed. C. Adam – P. Tannery, 11 vols. (Paris: 1964–1975).
- , *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, ed. F. Alquié, 3 vols., (Paris: 1963).
- Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *De l'éducation des filles* [1687], ed. J. Le Brun (Paris: 1983).
- La Bruyère Jean de, *Les Caractères*, ed. A. Adam (Paris: 1975).
- Malebranche Nicolas, *De la Recherche de la vérité*, ed. G. Rodis-Lewis (Paris: 1979).
- Poulain de la Barre François, *De l'égalité des deux sexes; De l'éducation des dames; De l'excellence des homes*, ed. M.-F. Pellegrin (Paris: 2011).
- Van Schurman Anna-Maria – Rivet André, *Question célèbre s'il est nécessaire ou non que les filles soient savantes* (Paris, Rolet le Duc: 1646).

Secondary Sources

- Alquié F., *Le Cartésianisme de Malebranche* (Paris: 1974).
- Jacques-Chaquin N., "La passion des sciences interdites: curiosité et démonologie (xv^e–xviii^e siècles)", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, 2 vols. (Fontenay-aux-Roses: 1998) 73–108.
- Pellegrin M.-F., "La science parfaite. Savants et savantes chez Poulain de la Barre", *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3 (2013) 377–392.

Women's Curiosity and Its Double at the Dawn of the Enlightenment

Christophe Martin

(trans. Peter Thomas)

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the tenets of Jansenism reactivated in France a tradition in Christian thought which condemned the desire for knowledge as a form of vanity, in every sense of the word: knowledge of nature and of creatures was considered to be inaccessible to human reason, and turned man away from the love of the Creator. The desire for knowledge was of course a cornerstone of the system of three concupiscences that Pascal borrowed from the *First Epistle of Saint John*: 'Everything that is in the world is concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, or pride of life: *libido sentiendi*, *libido sciendi*, *libido dominandi*'.¹ This was because 'since man has lost the true good, everything may equally appear to him such [...]. Some seek it in authority, others in curiosities and sciences, others in voluptuous pleasures'.² This *libido sciendi*, or 'concupiscence of the eyes', blinds the mind which loses its awareness of the insatiability of its desire and of the inaccessibility of the ultimate truths: 'the principal disease of man is a restless curiosity after things which he cannot know, and it is not so bad for him to be in error, as it is to have this useless curiosity'.³ On this point at least, Bossuet is in complete agreement with Pascal, when he describes curiosity as 'the mother of all the dangerous sciences' ('la mère de toutes les sciences dangereuses') by which he was admittedly referring primarily to magic, astrology and 'all the other sciences through

1 'Tout ce qui est au monde est concupiscence de la chair, ou concupiscence des yeux, ou orgueil de la vie: *libido sentiendi*, *libido sciendi*, *libido dominandi*', Pascal Blaise, *Pensées* (edition Lafuma n°545 / edition Brunschvicg n° 460).

2 'depuis que l'homme a perdu le vrai bien, tout également peut lui paraître tel. [...] Les uns le cherchent dans l'autorité, les autres dans les curiosités et les sciences, et les autres dans les voluptés', Pascal, *Pensées* (148/181).

3 'la maladie principale de l'homme est la curiosité inquiète des choses qu'il ne peut savoir et il ne lui est pas si mauvais d'être dans l'erreur que dans cette curiosité inutile', Pascal, *Pensées* (744 / 618).

which one imagines oneself able to divine the future;⁴ when God has reserved such knowledge to Himself, but which in fact also includes all the natural sciences. For this 'concupiscence of the eyes' is what produces the practice of sciences, which are dangerous as a matter of principle as they stem from a curiosity that, in the Bible, gives rise to Original Sin: when tempted by the serpent, Eve says that the fruit of 'the tree of the science of good and evil' ('l'arbre de la science du bien et du mal') is 'good and *pleasing to the eye*' ('beau et *agréable à la vue*'). She takes some and gives some to Adam: and 'at the same time, the eyes of both of them were opened' ('en même temps, leurs yeux furent ouverts à tous deux'⁵).

This is quite clearly the essential taboo standing in the way of women gaining access to culture and science throughout the seventeenth century.⁶ It is stated furthermore in so many words by the anonymous author of a book published in 1718, entitled *Les Femmes sçavantes ou Bibliothèque des dames qui traite des sciences qui conviennent aux dames*, and whose object – as indicated in the dedicatory epistle 'to scholarly and studious ladies' ('aux dames savantes et studieuses') – was to combat 'the unfair and disobliging feelings, which ignorant people had allowed themselves to develop, [that] made them condemn indiscriminately your studies and your science' ('les sentiments injustes et désavantageux, dont le peuple ignorant s'était laissé prévenir, [qui] lui faisaient condamner sans discrétion vos études et votre science'):

It was, it seems, a dishonour for you to love Literature, not only literature whose end was only curiosity and pleasure, but even that which was most likely to lead you to virtue and sound piety. It was required of you that you should remain in ignorance and the intention was that so many fine minds, full of vivacity and penetration, should be uneducated and as though buried in ignorance. *It was claimed that science was a fruit that you were not allowed to touch, without bringing into the world a series of misfortunes, as did in earlier times the first of all women, by eating the fruit that God had forbidden.* A prejudice that was so fatal for your glory led me to take up your defence and to make manifest that those who hold such feelings are mistaken; that science and study are occupations worthy of

4 'toutes les autres sciences par lesquelles on s'imagine pouvoir deviner l'avenir', Bossuet Jacques-Bénigne, *Catéchisme du diocèse de Meaux* (Paris, Sébastien Marbre-Cramoisy: 1687) 166.

5 *La Bible*, trans. L.-I. Lemaître de Sacy, "Genèse", chap. III, v. 6–7.

6 See Timmermans L., *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598–1715). Un débat d'idées de saint François de Sales à la marquise de Lambert* (Paris: 1993).

ladies; that it is glorious for them to follow the example of a large number of princesses and illustrious people, who have combined with the most sublime knowledge the most dazzling virtues.⁷

Should these words be seen as emblematic of a change in attitudes, paving the way for an age of Enlightenment that would necessarily *also* be that of 'progress' in legitimising access to philosophy for women, or even the acceptance of their status as possible producers of knowledge and thought? It is important not to jump to conclusions in this matter, given that recent research has called into question the received and misguided view that the eighteenth century was a period of emancipation for women in every respect.⁸ Not only was the argument that all interest in philosophy and science on the part of women was fundamentally undesirable or ridiculous clearly refuted before the Enlightenment, but also the refutation itself is far from univocal, as we shall demonstrate. It carries within it tensions that – while not being reduced to a simple opposition between Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment – form profound dividing lines between sets of arguments that, at first sight, may seem to be defending the same cause. Two main paradigms can be identified in the defence and illustration of women's desire for knowledge: either this desire is at least partially legitimised, but in a way which requires a radical disqualification of the *other* type of curiosity, that is more archaic and is supposed to be natural for women; or inversely, it is the basically *impure* and sexually characterised drive of this 'original' curiosity that is exploited as a way of overcoming

7 'C'était, ce semble, un déshonneur pour vous d'aimer les Belles Lettres, non seulement celles qui n'avaient pour fin que la curiosité et le plaisir, mais même celles qui étaient les plus propres à vous porter à la vertu et à une solide piété. On exigeait de vous que vous demeurassiez dans l'ignorance et on voulait que tant de beaux esprits, pleins de vivacité et de pénétration, fussent incultes et comme ensevelis dans l'ignorance. *On prétendait que la science était un fruit auquel vous ne pouviez toucher, sans apporter dans le monde une suite de malheurs, comme fit autrefois la première de toutes les femmes, en mangeant du fruit que Dieu lui avait défendu.* Un préjugé si funeste à votre gloire, m'a porté à prendre votre défense et à faire voir que ceux qui ont de tels sentiments se trompent; que la science et l'étude sont des occupations dignes des dames; qu'il leur est glorieux de suivre l'exemple d'un grand nombre de princesses et de personnes illustres, qui ont joint aux connaissances les plus sublimes les vertus les plus éclatantes'. Anon., *Les Femmes sçavantes ou Bibliothèque des dames qui traite des sciences qui conviennent aux dames, des livres qu'elles peuvent lire et l'histoire de celles qui ont excellé dans les sciences*, M.N.C. (Amsterdam, Michel-Charles Le Cène: 1718) [11–111].

8 See Lotterie F., *Le Genre des Lumières. Femme et philosophe au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 2013). For a critique of this prejudice, see also our *Espaces du féminin dans le roman français du XVIII^e siècle* (Oxford: 2004).

resistance placed in the way of a philosophy whose Promethean ambition, increasingly clearly assumed, makes it encourage the use of techniques and even of a form of violence to assuage its desire to 'see nature in itself' ('voir la nature en elle-même'⁹), so as to steal its secrets and elucidate its mysteries.¹⁰

To consider the first position, whereby the legitimacy of women's access to science is conditional not only on a strict demarcation of the knowledge reserved for them but also on censorship of all *unsuitable* forms of curiosity, mention should first be made of *Les Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie, et principalement de la morale*, by Louis de Lesclache, published in 1667. This is not because this follower of scholastic philosophy may be considered to have been a founder of this approach, but rather because the limits he places on knowledge that is suitable for women are so restrictive that they demonstrate the paradoxical proximity of this position with a radical exclusion of women from the sphere of philosophy and science. In the first chapter, Lesclache begins to sketch a portrait of the perfect counter-model he wants to give to women, by portraying the excessive passion that the wife of a person he knows feels for 'false' philosophy. If the husband claims that 'philosophy is damaging to [the mind] of women' ('la philosophie est nuisible à [l'esprit] des femmes'), it is because his wife engages in a series of activities and experiments that bear witness to a ridiculously disordered mind and their complete and utter moral *unsuitability*. After becoming obsessed with physics, she goes to the home of a philosopher one day to see two ivory spheres that are made to knock against each other on a table, in order to find out 'by how many degrees the larger one would make the smaller one move backwards' ('de combien de degrés la plus grosse ferait reculer la plus petite'). On another occasion, she performs 'some experiment to find a vacuum in nature'.¹¹ She also takes part in grotesque astrological observations and farcical chemistry experiments. But the most exemplary illustration of her crazed curiosity comes when she spends 'more than half the night in the attic observing the moon with a large telescope: her folly was so great that she imagined that the moon was inhabited, for she had said in a gathering of the curious that she would give

9 In the words of Montesquieu Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de, *Pensées*, n° 158, ed. C. Volpilhac-Augier (Paris: 2014) 378.

10 Concerning this Promethean attitude, see Hadot P., *Le Voile d'Isis. Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de Nature* (Paris: 2004). See also our article, "La nature dévoilée (de Fontenelle à Rousseau)", *Dix-huitième siècle* 45 (2013) 79–95.

11 'quelque expérience pour chercher du vide dans la nature', Lesclache Louis de, *Les Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie, et principalement de la morale, ou l'abrégé de cette science* (Paris, Laurent Rondet: 1667) 4.

two thousand écus to anyone who could invent a large telescope to find out how the people of the moon were dressed'.¹²

In fact this grotesque portrayal of women's curiosity provides a precious insight into the figure of the 'Marquise' that Fontenelle develops, in 1686, in *Les Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. For as we shall see, it is as though Fontenelle deliberately and methodically infringed on the restrictions advocated by Lesclache, who aims to achieve nothing short of the introduction of a not-so-subtle *distinguo* between 'false' and 'true' philosophy, the former being damaging to women's minds and dangerous for public morals, and the latter (that which is suitable for women's minds) reduced almost solely to a 'knowledge of the virtues they must put into practice and of the vices they must combat'.¹³ The only concern of Lesclache would seem indeed to consist of drawing the frontiers and mapping the exclusion zones of this science that is *suitable* for women, and in a way he is providing a 'negative' of the very territory that Fontenelle was to explore twenty years later:

[Women] must not apply themselves to the study of physics to find a new world on the moon, nor to examine whether comets are perspiration from the whole of the elementary sphere or to combat this ridiculous opinion, nor to perform several experiments to weigh air, to defend the vacuum, or combat it, for this research and several others of the same kind are unworthy of the occupation of a true philosopher; but they must draw from physics a knowledge of their soul, so as to elevate themselves to that of God.

They must place limits on the curiosity they might have to examine the causes of all the wonders of nature, for God teaches us in the third

12 'plus de la moitié de la nuit dans le grenier à regarder la lune avec de grandes lunettes: son extravagance était si grande qu'elle s'imaginait que la lune était habitée, car elle avait dit dans une assemblée de curieux qu'elle donnerait deux mille écus à celui qui pourrait inventer de grandes lunettes pour découvrir de quelle façon les peuples de la lune étaient vêtus' (Lesclache, *Les Avantages* 5). In *La Philosophie des gens de cour*, the Abbé Gérard considers this topical figure, and portrays, after Molière, a learned woman with a disordered mind who 'only seeks in philosophy that which is most curious, for example whether there is a world in the moon'. ('ne cherche dans [la] philosophie que ce qu'il y a de plus curieux, comme par exemple s'il y a un monde dans la lune'.) See Abbé Gérard Armand de, *Les Entretiens de Philémon et de Théandre sur la Philosophie des Gens de Cour, Morale, ou Le Caractère de l'honneste homme et du chrétien* (Paris, Veuve Sébastien Hure: 1682) 71.

13 'connaissance des vertus qu'elles doivent pratiquer et celle des vices qu'elles doivent combattre' (Lesclache, *Les Avantages* 11).

chapter of *Ecclesiastes* that there are several of his works that surpass our understanding. [...]

Women who would like to apply themselves to the study of physics should know that a person who seeks knowledge of all natural things puts himself in peril of working uselessly, of falling into several errors and of turning against God as a result of his vanity.¹⁴

It is the same tendency to exclude the 'bad' kind of female curiosity that underpins the views of Fénelon – admittedly expressed more subtly – in his treatise *De l'éducation des filles* (1687). Like the text of Lesclache, that of Fénelon is admittedly first intended to refute the view of those who want to keep women in a state of ignorance about everything: 'it is assumed that this sex must be given little instruction. [...] As for girls, they say, they must not be learned, curiosity makes them vain and *précieuses*'.¹⁵ But in fact, Fénelon continues, it is on the contrary lack of instruction that has damaging consequences, as it allows young girls to fall prey to their natural curiosity (the love of novelty being 'natural' for the female gender¹⁶) which is necessarily disordered: 'The ignorance of a girl', says Fénelon, 'is the reason why she feels dull and does not know how to busy herself innocently. [...] Badly educated girls who have not applied themselves have an imagination that is always wandering. For lack of solid sustenance, their curiosity turns ardently towards vain and dangerous

14 '[Les femmes] ne doivent pas s'appliquer à l'étude de la physique pour chercher un nouveau monde dans la lune, ni pour examiner si les comètes sont des sueurs de toute la sphère élémentaire ou pour combattre cette ridicule opinion, ni pour faire plusieurs expériences pour peser l'air, pour défendre le vide, ou pour le combattre, car ces recherches et plusieurs autres de même nature sont indignes de l'occupation d'un véritable philosophe; mais elles doivent tirer de la physique la connaissance de leur âme, pour s'élever à celle de Dieu.

Elles doivent mettre des bornes à la curiosité qu'elles pourraient avoir d'examiner les causes de toutes les merveilles de la nature, car Dieu nous enseigne au troisième chapitre de *L'Ecclesiastique* qu'il y a plusieurs de ses ouvrages qui surpassent notre connaissance. [...] Les femmes qui voudront s'appliquer à l'étude de la physique, doivent savoir que celui qui cherche la connaissance de toutes les choses naturelles le met en péril de travailler inutilement, de tomber en plusieurs erreurs et de s'élever contre Dieu par sa vanité'. Lesclache, *Les Avantages* 173–174.

15 'on suppose qu'on doit donner à ce sexe peu d'instruction. [...] Pour les filles, dit-on, il ne faut pas qu'elles soient savantes, la curiosité les rend vaines et précieuses'. Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *De l'éducation des filles*, I, in *Œuvres*, I, ed. J. Le Brun (Paris: 1983) 91 [hereafter DEF].

16 DEF VII, 134.

objects'.¹⁷ The aim therefore is not merely to guide ('orienter'¹⁸), but also to add an extra dimension to the natural curiosity of the female sex and to *purify* it: 'for if you do not give them a reasonable curiosity, they will have a disordered one'.¹⁹ This suggests that any overhasty desire for knowledge amongst young girls should be both circumscribed and inhibited, as reflected in this eloquent recommendation: 'Restrain their mind as much as you can within the common limits; and teach them that there must be, for their sex, a modesty about science almost as delicate as that inspired by horror of vice'.²⁰ Admittedly, 'a curious woman will find that this places extremely narrow limits on her curiosity', ('une femme curieuse trouvera que c'est donner des bornes bien étroites à sa curiosité'), but in point of fact, 'she is mistaken; this is because she is unaware of the importance and extent of the things I propose that she instruct herself in'.²¹ The crux of the matter, once again (as in Lesclache's treatise), is to strictly define the territory in which this purified female curiosity may be exercised. For, as Rousseau puts it in Book v of *Émile*, women 'must learn many things, but only those it is *suitable* for them to know'.²²

As with Lesclache, this is indeed the ultimate purpose and deepest justification of the refutation of the argument that women should be kept in the most complete ignorance. Purified curiosity thus paradoxically becomes the best weapon against women's natural curiosity: 'people who are educated, and engaged in serious matters, ordinarily have only a middling curiosity: what they know makes them scorn many things they ignore; they see the uselessness

17 'L'ignorance d'une fille est cause qu'elle s'ennuie et qu'elle ne sait à quoi s'occuper innocemment. [...] Les filles mal instruites et inappliquées ont une imagination toujours errante. Faute d'aliment solide, leur curiosité se tourne avec ardeur vers les objets vains et dangereux' (DEF II, 93 and 95). See M.-F. Pellegrin's chapter in the present volume.

18 The term used by Patricia Touboul in "Le statut des femmes: nature et condition sociale dans le traité *De l'éducation des filles* de Fénelon", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 2 (2004) 332.

19 'car si vous ne leur donnez une curiosité raisonnable, elles en auront une déréglée' (DEF IX, 147).

20 'Retenez leur esprit le plus que vous pourrez dans les bornes communes; et apprenez-leur qu'il doit y avoir, pour leur sexe, une pudeur sur la science, presque aussi délicate que celle qui inspire l'horreur du vice' (DEF VII, 131).

21 'elle se trompe; c'est qu'elle ne connaît pas l'importance et l'étendue des choses dont je lui propose de s'instruire' (DEF XI, 154).

22 'doivent apprendre beaucoup de choses, mais seulement celles qu'il leur convient de savoir'. See Rousseau Jean-Jacques, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), Livre v, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: 1969) 703. According to Fénelon, 'la science des femmes, comme celle des hommes, doit se borner à s'instruire par rapport à leurs fonctions' (DEF XI, 154).

and ridiculousness of most things that small minds, that know nothing, and have nothing to do, are eager to learn'.²³

If administered correctly, the instruction given to women can thus be the best *pharmakon* for their naturally disordered curiosity. The anonymous author of the treatise entitled *Les Femmes sçavantes ou Bibliothèque des dames qui traite des sciences qui conviennent aux dames*, referred to above (and whose title clearly indicates that its aim is, once again, to limit women's curiosity for sciences to those that are *suitable* for them), draws a Manichean distinction – less subtly than Fénelon – between scientific curiosity and women's natural curiosity, postulating that basically they are totally unrelated and that the former thus has nothing to fear from the latter:

Curiosity is a very dangerous vice and very common in a woman. Curiosity, on the other hand, is the mother of the sciences, and in this respect, far from being a vice, it is a virtue, and a perfection that God has placed in us to make us seek the truth. There are therefore two sorts of curiosity, one good and one bad, one which generates a great deal of disorder, and one which leads to something desirable and worthy of esteem. The former is the vice of a woman, and the latter is a perfection in our soul which leads to good. Let us consider briefly if the latter could be dangerous for a woman because of the former [...] No doubt not, and the two have nothing in common except the resemblance of the name. The curiosity of a woman, which is an unfortunate vice that one ordinarily notices in most of them, makes her worried and suspicious. [...] She wants to know good and evil, just as Eve once did, the first woman who went to consult the serpent out of curiosity. [...] This is the curiosity that is ordinarily condemned, and that one cannot indeed condemn too strongly in a woman, as being the source of an infinite number of ills and misfortunes, of which the world is replete. Curiosity for science produces a quite different effect and is something completely different. For it is a certain desire and leaning, that God has placed in us and that leads us to seek the truth, by clear and evident demonstrations, and by everything that can contribute to the perfection of art or science, which it is our purpose to acquire.²⁴

23 'les personnes instruites, et occupées à des choses sérieuses, n'ont d'ordinaire qu'une curiosité médiocre: ce qu'elles savent leur donne du mépris pour beaucoup de choses qu'elles ignorent; elles voient l'inutilité et le ridicule de la plupart des choses que les petits esprits qui ne savent rien, et qui n'ont rien à faire, sont empressés d'apprendre' (DEF II, 95).

24 'La curiosité est un vice très dangereux et très commun à une femme. La curiosité, d'un autre côté est la mère des sciences, et à cet égard bien loin d'être un vice, c'est une vertu,

Far from gratifying women's natural vice, curiosity for science fortunately turns them away from it. The argument would thus be very close to the Fénelonian idea of a remedy in the illness itself, had the author not reduced the relationship between the two kinds of curiosity to a pure homonymy:

The curiosity one has for science has nothing in common with that of reading dangerous books, which is an effect of the passion for idleness, and of corruption of the heart, and thus experience teaches us that ignorant women are more attached to such reading matter, and more curious about bad books, than scholarly women and women who are studious.²⁵

It is precisely when considering this crucial question that it is important to discern a quite different line of thought in arguments refuting the necessity of maintaining women in ignorance of science and philosophy. Without adopting an anachronistic approach by attributing to this set of arguments a protofreudian quality and the presentiment of a link between 'knowledge drive' and sexual curiosity, this second paradigm is different in that it refuses to consider curiosity for science as an antidote to the supposedly natural curiosity of women. On the contrary, the aim is to make use of the fundamentally impure energy of this 'avidité curieuse' (to use the Lacanian translation of the 'knowledge drive' or *Wissenstrieb*), and to turn it into a powerful mechanism to drive

et une perfection que Dieu a mise en nous pour nous engager à rechercher la vérité. Il y a donc deux sortes de curiosité, une bonne et une mauvaise, une qui produit beaucoup de désordres, et une qui conduit à quelque chose de désirable et d'estimable. La première, est le vice d'une femme, la seconde, est une perfection de notre âme qui se porte au bien. Voyons un peu si celle-ci pourrait être dangereuse à une femme à cause de celle-là [...] Non sans doute et elles ne s'accordent en rien que dans la ressemblance du nom. La curiosité d'une femme, qui est un vice malheureux qu'on remarque ordinairement dans la plupart, la rend inquiète et soupçonneuse. [...] Elle veut savoir le bien et le mal, comme fit autrefois Ève, la première femme qui alla par curiosité consulter le serpent. [...] C'est-là la curiosité que l'on condamne ordinairement, et que l'on ne peut en effet trop condamner dans une femme, comme étant la source d'une infinité de maux et de malheurs, dont le monde est rempli. La curiosité des sciences produit un effet tout différent et est tout autre chose. Car c'est un certain désir et un penchant, que Dieu a mis en nous et qui nous porte à rechercher la vérité, par des démonstrations claires et évidentes, et par tout ce qui peut contribuer à la perfection de l'art ou de la science, que nous avons pour but d'acquérir' (Anon., *Les Femmes sçavantes* 124–127).

- 25 'La curiosité que l'on a pour les sciences n'a rien de commun avec celle de lire les livres dangereux, qui est un effet de la passion de l'oisiveté, et de la corruption du cœur, aussi l'expérience nous fait voir que les femmes ignorantes sont plus attachées à ces lectures, et plus curieuses des mauvais livres, que les savantes et que celles qui sont studieuses' (Anon., *Les Femmes sçavantes* 127–128).

a double emancipation: the emancipation of women but also, and perhaps primarily, of philosophy itself.

We may usefully refer here briefly to Poulain de La Barre. As Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin in particular has emphasized, he is the one who deserves credit for achieving – particularly in his treatise *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (1673) – a remarkable reversal (clearly of Cartesian inspiration) which paradoxically turns women's ignorance of science into a virtue in terms of gaining access to knowledge, and in being a real driving force for science:

Not only does one find a very great number of women whose judgement of matters is just as good as if they had been given the best education, without having either the prejudices or the confusion of ideas that are so customary with scholars; but indeed one sees many such whose common sense is so true, that they talk about the objects of the finest sciences as if they had always studied them.²⁶

In fact, this ignorance on the part of women should be considered to be 'a form of intellectual openness that retains only common sense as the faculty that drives reasoning. The mind of a woman is set in motion by the same spur as that of the sages: curiosity. A fault traditionally attributed to women and a topos of misogynous writings, curiosity in fact constitutes the essence of the truly scientific attitude'.²⁷ The metamorphosis of this vice, supposed to be natural in women, into a specifically scientific virtue involves a radical critique of 'the dominant figure of science',²⁸ which is discarded because of its refusal to allow that Cartesian 'common sense' or women's curiosity could have any value.

26 'Non seulement on trouve un très grand nombre de femmes qui jugent aussi bien des choses que si on leur avait donné la meilleure éducation, sans avoir ni les préjugés, ni les idées confuses, si ordinaires aux savants; mais même on en voit beaucoup qui ont le bon sens si juste, qu'elles parlent sur les objets des plus belles sciences, comme si elles les avaient toujours étudiées' Poulain de la Barre François, *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, ed. M.-F. Pellegrin (Paris: 2011) 77.

27 'une forme de disponibilité intellectuelle qui ne conserve que le bon sens comme faculté impulsant le raisonnement. L'esprit féminin est mu par le même aiguillon que celui des sages: la curiosité. Défaut traditionnellement imputé aux femmes et topos des écrits misogynes, la curiosité constitue en réalité l'essence de l'attitude scientifique véritable'. Pellegrin M.-F., "La science parfaite. Savants et savantes chez Poulain de la Barre", *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3.138 (2013) 382–383. See also M.-F. Pellegrin's chapter *supra*.

28 'la figure dominante de la science', Pellegrin, "La science parfaite" 383.

It is quite clear that, in his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Fontenelle has taken on board the lessons of Poulain de La Barre's treatise, and that he is able to channel the 'impure' energy of a sexually charged curiosity to overcome resistance opposing the desire for knowledge and the development of a 'modern' critical philosophy. It is no coincidence that the *Entretiens* opens with a reference to a 'scopic drive' that is generated with great insistence. From the beginning of the dialogue, the pleasure of the eyes has clear erotic connotations:

The Moon had been risen, perhaps, about an hour; and her rays, which came to us through the branches of the trees, made an agreeable mixture of a very lively white, with all the surrounding green, which appeared to be dark. [...] This scene threw me into a reverie; and, had it not been for the Marchioness, I might not have awakened from it for a long time; but the presence of a Lady so amiable, would not permit me to continue for long in it, and wholly to abandon myself to the Moon and the stars.²⁹

The Marquise does however notice the reverie into which the philosopher had been about to fall 'at the sight of this fine night' ('à la vue de cette belle nuit'). There follows a eulogy of night that is so densely packed with poetic references ('the day itself is not so fine as a fine night' ('le jour même n'est pas si beau qu'une belle nuit') that it cannot fail to win over the Marquise: 'I have always thought the same [...]. I love the Stars, and I readily and freely complain of the Sun, who deprives me of the sight of them' ('J'ai toujours senti ce que vous me dites [...]. J'aime les Étoiles, et je me plaindrais volontiers du soleil qui nous les efface'). The philosopher seemingly only glosses the young woman's words, but in passing he employs a term intended to stimulate her curiosity: 'Ah! I cried, I cannot pardon him for depriving us of the sight of all these Worlds' ('Ah! m'écriai-je, je ne puis lui pardonner de me faire perdre de vue tous ces Mondes'). The intrusion of this scholarly lexeme (in the plural, this term necessarily forms part of the vocabulary of astronomy) in the very midst

29 'La Lune était levée il y avait peut-être une heure, et ses rayons qui ne venaient à nous qu'entre les branches des arbres, faisaient un agréable mélange d'un blanc fort vif, avec tout ce vert qui paraissait noir. [...] Ce spectacle me fit rêver; et peut-être sans la Marquise eussé-je rêvé assez longtemps; mais la présence d'une si aimable dame ne me permit pas de m'abandonner à la Lune et aux étoiles'. Fontenelle Bernard Le Bouyer de, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. C. Martin (Paris: 1998) 59. The 1760 anonymous translation of *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (London, R. Withy, H. Woodgate, S. Brookes, and J. Cook: 1760) has been freely used here and in other quotations of the text.

of his seductive discourse is extremely effective, as the disdain of the 'bergère' gives way to an irresistible attraction: "What do you call all these Worlds?" she said, looking at me, and turning towards me'.³⁰ The dialogue is then constructed around four words that all arouse the desire of the Marquise: after the 'Mondes', come 'folie', 'plaisir' and 'raison'. The last of these – once stripped of its initially unattractive aspect for a beautiful *mondaine* by the attractive constellation it forms in the scholar's words with 'folie' and 'plaisir' – also becomes an object of temptation.

But what is most noteworthy is the strategy of feigned reticence and retention of knowledge, which not only wounds the Marquise's self-esteem, but also throws a veil over the spectacle of the stars that is intended to exacerbate her curiosity. This line of argument, which ceaselessly feigns refusal of what it is looking to obtain, finally takes a frankly equivocal turn: 'I had resolution enough to defend myself for some time in this manner, *but was at length obliged to submit*. I made her at least promise, *for my honour*, that she would keep the secret'. (J'eus beau encore me défendre quelque temps sur ce ton-là, *il fallut céder*. Je lui fis du moins promettre *pour mon honneur*, qu'elle me garderait le secret'). These are the typical and easily recognisable words of a coquettish woman giving in to the insistence of a skilful seducer. It is now indeed the shepherd-philosopher who holds treasures that whet the appetite of the Marquise. It is as though, from this moment onwards, the erotic dimension of the relationship between the philosopher and the Marquise were (except for some badinage relegated to the margins of the text, at the start or end of the various 'evenings') entirely transposed into the philosophical relationship.

After sparking the desire of the Marquise by a strategy of reluctance and veiling ('no [...], I will not face the reproach that in the woods, at ten o'clock in the evening, I spoke of philosophy to the most agreeable person I know'³¹), the philosopher has only to play on the avid curiosity that he has just elicited:

The whole of philosophy, I said to her, is founded upon these two things: That *our minds are curious; and our eyes bad*: for, if you had better eyes than you have, you would clearly see if the stars are suns which illuminate a corresponding number of worlds, or if they are not; and *if on the other hand you were less curious, you would not wish to know*, which would

30 'Qu'appellez-vous tous ces Mondes, me dit-elle, en me regardant, et en se tournant vers moi?' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 61).

31 'non [...], il ne me sera point reproché que dans un bois, à dix heures du soir, j'aie parlé de philosophie à la plus aimable personne que je connaisse' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 61).

be just the same; but we wish to know more than we can see; this is the difficulty. (Toute la philosophie, lui dis-je, n'est fondée que sur deux choses, sur ce qu'on a l'esprit curieux et les yeux mauvais: car si vous aviez les yeux meilleurs que vous ne les avez, vous verriez bien si les étoiles sont des soleils qui éclairent autant de mondes, ou si elles n'en sont pas; et si d'un autre côté vous étiez moins curieuse, vous ne vous soucieriez pas de le savoir, ce qui reviendrait au même; mais on veut savoir plus qu'on ne voit, c'est là la difficulté.)

As in Poulain de La Barre, women's curiosity becomes the model for a scientific attitude. Philippe Hamou has rightly emphasised the emblematic value of this text in the context of a 'mutation of the visible'.³² But the strangeness he notes in this proposition – which seems to imply by a logical progression that 'if we had received from Nature a perfect vision, our philosophical curiosity would have been satisfied in advance' ('si nous avions reçu de la Nature une vision parfaite, notre curiosité philosophique serait par avance comblée') – perhaps does not allow for a clear definition of the real issue. In fact, all the indications are that Fontenelle has once again taken great pleasure in reversing an argument put forward by Louis de Lesclache, namely that 'if all things were tangible, and if we could know everything that is in the world, we could doubt the existence of God, who is intangible, and of whom we cannot have perfect knowledge, and this is why He wanted most things to be unknown to the mind of men, to prevent them from bringing His existence into doubt'.³³ The viewpoint has been completely reversed. Applying providentialist logic, Lesclache interpreted the fact that reality could not be reduced to what is tangible as the sign of a divine will encouraging men to never forget that the works of God surpass our understanding, and to be open to faith and invisible realities. For Fontenelle, however, the situation is quite the opposite: the divorce between what is tangible and a reality that completely transcends it becomes the very principle of scientific curiosity. The philosopher repeats this to the Marquise at the end of the third evening: 'do not believe that we see all the inhabitants of the Earth; there are as many kinds of animals invisible as well

32 Hamou P., *La Mutation du visible. Essai sur la portée épistémologique des instruments d'optique au XVII^e siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: 1999) vol. 1, 13 ff.

33 'si toutes choses étaient sensibles, et si nous pouvions connaître tout ce qui est dans le monde, nous pourrions douter de l'existence de Dieu, qui est insensible, et dont nous ne pouvons avoir une parfaite connaissance, c'est pourquoi il a voulu que la plupart des choses fussent inconnues à l'esprit des hommes, pour les empêcher de révoquer en doute son existence' (Lesclache, *Les Avantages* 173–174).

as visible. [...] Nature has so liberally spread animals [on Earth] that it gives her not any uneasiness, our having seen only the moiety'.³⁴ In a natural world that has visibly been deserted by God (Fontenelle stubbornly uses no other term than 'nature'), the irreducibility of reality to the human horizon of what is tangible is the most powerful driving force of a scientific activity that 'finds its place in the yawning gap between a world that is hiding itself and a curious mind'.³⁵

The roots of scientific activity are thus profoundly 'impure' because science draws on the same sources as the supposedly natural curiosity of women, of which the Marquise is here the representative. The logic of Fontenelle's argument is fundamentally just the same here as in *De l'Origine des fables*. One of the major originalities of Fontenelle's treatise on fables is that he suggests, as the title indicates, that primitive fables have a single origin.³⁶ That origin is quite simply the desire to know and to explain. Affabulation is only an initial type of rational explanation: 'there was philosophy even in these coarse centuries, and it was used a great deal in the birth of fables'.³⁷ For 'the men who have a little more genius than others' ('les hommes qui ont un peu plus de génie que les autres') are characterised by an epistemophilia that is itself one of the main sources of affabulation. 'Where can this river that always flows come from?' ('D'où peut venir cette rivière qui coule toujours?') is the question asked by one of the first 'contemplatifs' of humanity. This is the first example chosen by Fontenelle for the origin of fables: ('after a long meditation, he fortunately came up with the idea that there was someone who always took care to pour out this water from a jug' ('après une longue méditation, il a trouvé fort heureusement qu'il y avait quelqu'un qui avait toujours soin de verser cette eau de dedans une cruche'.)) This 'contemplative' is probably a 'strange philosopher', but Fontenelle emphasises that he 'would perhaps have been a Descartes in this century' ('aurait peut-être été un Descartes dans ce siècle-ci').

34 'ne croyez pas que nous voyions tout ce qui habite la Terre; il y a autant d'espèces d'animaux invisibles que de visibles. [...] La nature a si libéralement répandu les animaux [sur la terre] qu'elle ne s'est pas mise en peine que l'on en vît seulement la moitié' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 112 and 114).

35 'trouve sa place dans la bécasse ouverte entre un monde qui se cache et un esprit curieux'. Beugnot B., "De l'histoire des savants à l'histoire des sciences", in Niderst A. (ed.), *Fontenelle. Actes du colloque de Rouen* (Paris: 1989) 491.

36 See on this point Poulouin C., "Fontenelle et la vérité des fables", *Corpus* 13 (1990) 38.

37 'il y a eu de la philosophie même dans ces siècles grossiers, et elle a beaucoup servi à la naissance des fables'. Fontenelle Bernard Le Bouyer de, *De l'origine des fables*, in *Rêveries diverses. Opusculs littéraires et philosophiques*, ed. A. Niderst (Paris: 1994) 99.

His extravagant explanations stem from a psychological reality (the desire to know) which is also at the source of the 'philosophy' of the moderns. Thus it is the same desire to know (supported by a frustrated scopic drive) which forms the source of primitive fables and philosophy.

The curiosity of the Marquise, which the philosopher takes pleasure in arousing at the start of the *Entretiens*, is thus in a sense hardly any 'cruder' than that of the early men who imagined primitive fables. But in another sense, its value is no less than that of the curiosity which has led to the greatest discoveries of modern times: 'and thus the true philosophers spend their lives not believing what they see, and endeavouring to divine that which they see not'.³⁸ The preface to the *Entretiens* ostensibly plays with this eminently *reversible* value of the curiosity that they encourage. On the one hand, nothing should more legitimately awaken the curiosity of the reader than the matter with which Fontenelle has chosen to compose his dialogues: 'I shall not amuse myself further by saying, that I have chosen in all Philosophy, a subject that is most capable of piquing the curiosity of the Reader. To me it appears nothing ought interest us more, than knowing how this world is made which we inhabit; and if there are other worlds like this which are also inhabited'.³⁹ But on the other hand, Fontenelle does not fail to underline the playful, frivolous and insignificant nature of his words and speculations on the inhabitants of planets, and pretends not to realise that these questions are extremely controversial from the viewpoint of religious orthodoxy: 'But, after all, every one may carry their enquiries as far as they please. Those who have thoughts to waste can waste them on these sorts of subjects; but not everyone is in a situation to make this wasteful expense'. ('Mais après tout, s'inquiète de tout cela qui veut. Ceux qui ont des pensées à perdre, les peuvent perdre sur ces sortes de sujets; mais tout le monde n'est pas en état de faire cette dépense inutile'.) As Claire Cazanave points out, 'the only motivation that remains is therefore a pure desire to know, the *libido sciendi* that is precisely what religion condemns. This is more than a slight provocation, and Fontenelle underlines it with great

38 'ainsi les vrais philosophes passent leur vie à ne point croire ce qu'ils voient, et à tâcher de deviner ce qu'ils ne voient point' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 62).

39 'Je ne m'amuserai point à dire que j'ai choisi dans toute la philosophie la matière la plus capable de piquer la curiosité. Il semble que rien ne devrait nous intéresser davantage, que de savoir comment est fait ce monde que nous habitons, s'il y a d'autres mondes semblables, et qui soient habités aussi' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 50–51).

pleasure, by dedicating his book explicitly to women so that they may satisfy their curiosity concerning the plurality of worlds'.⁴⁰

It is therefore not coincidental that the famous opera metaphor which constitutes the attractive Marquise's first astronomy lesson ('I always represent to myself, that Nature is a great spectacle which resembles that of the opera') ['je me figure toujours que la Nature est un grand spectacle qui ressemble à celui de l'opéra'] is based directly on this initial avidity of sight that the philosopher has aroused. An early expression of this metaphor, if not its origin, may be found in one of La Mothe Le Vayer's writings entitled *De la curiosité*: 'The world is a theatre on which [man] can cast his eyes in all directions'.⁴¹ The philosopher then continues to play on the eroticism of unveiling: 'I need only draw up the curtain, to discover the world to you'.⁴² This inaugural gesture initiates the Marquise into a true cult of curiosity. Taking as its initial model the comparison between the mechanics of nature and the flight of Phaeton at the Opera, the aim throughout the *Entretiens* is to constantly move from the visible face to the hidden face, a movement of revelation that drives the pupil to penetrate the intimacy of nature: 'I would be delighted to know in even greater detail *what the inside of the country is like*', the Marquise says in speaking about the moon.⁴³

Once this curiosity has been aroused, the question then becomes one of knowing how to constantly renew the objects of curiosity; and this is one of the essential virtues of the logic of possibilities that is propounded in Fontenelle's text, and which is made manifest in particular in a pronounced taste for self-contradiction and palinody.⁴⁴ The ultimate purpose of the scholarly discourse is less to demonstrate the validity of a particular scientific system than to

40 'la seule motivation qui demeure est donc un pur désir de savoir, cette libido sciendi que condamne précisément la religion. La provocation n'est pas mince, et Fontenelle la souligne à plaisir en destinant explicitement son livre aux femmes afin qu'elles satisfassent leur curiosité sur la question de la pluralité des mondes'. Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. C. Cazanave, preface, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. C. Poulouin (Paris: 2013) t. I, 70.

41 'Le monde est un théâtre sur lequel [l'homme] peut jeter les yeux de toute part', La Mothe Le Vayer François de, *De la Curiosité*, in *Œuvres* (Paris, Augustin Courbé: 1662) t. II, Lettre XVI, 464.

42 'je n'ai qu'à tirer le rideau et à vous montrer le monde' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 65).

43 'je serais bien aise de savoir encore plus en détail comment est fait le dedans du pays' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 90).

44 This taste is a legacy from mid-century scepticism and scholarly libertinage. See on this point the analyses of Sylvia Giocanti: 'La Mothe Le Vayer: scepticisme libertin et pratique de la contrariété', *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle* 1 (1996) 27–53.

undermine the naïve certainties of ignorance. The theories are primarily (and Fontenelle never hides this) set out for pleasure, and the Marquise should expect a possible retraction at any moment. The Fontenellian 'Why not?' is the principle which keeps the curiosity alert by leaving it perpetually unsatisfied: 'yesterday you had prepared me to see [the inhabitants of the Moon] come here on the first day, and today they are not even in the world? You shall not play with me in this manner'. ('hier vous m'aviez préparée à voir [les habitants de la Lune] venir ici au premier jour, et aujourd'hui ils ne seraient seulement pas au monde? Vous ne vous jouerez point ainsi de moi'.) In fact, the scholar considers that it is necessary for him either to play with the Marquise, or at least to play with her ideas, leaving them in a state of suspense which maintains the possibility of her desire, at the very heart of this universe of possibilities.

The opening of the fifth evening (the last in the 1686 edition) emphasises the total success of this strategy: 'The Marquise felt a real *impatience to know* what the fixed stars would become'. ('La Marquise sentit une vraie *impatience de savoir* ce que les étoiles fixes deviendraient'.) Throughout these nocturnal dialogues, the *libido sciendi* is maintained by a skilful renewal of pleasures, drawing its seductive force from the Copernican revolution ('you will turn with pleasure and you will conceive of delightful ideas about this system'⁴⁵), and above all the Cartesian 'tourbillons', 'whose name is so terrifying and the idea of which is so agreeable'⁴⁶ that they enable the Philosopher to make the Marquise dizzy, and Fontenelle to make use of an array of gallantly equivocal expressions: 'I beg your grace, she cried, I submit; You confound me with Worlds and *vortexes*'.⁴⁷ And in another example:

Must my head turn round, she said laughing; it is fine to know what these *vortexes* are. Complete my folly, I cannot longer forbear, nor do I know, when or where to stop, as Philosophy is the subject: let the whole world say what they please, I must be acquainted with these *vortexes*. I didn't know you could get carried away like that, I continued; what a pity that the cause is merely *vortexes*.⁴⁸

45 'vous tournerez avec plaisir et vous vous ferez sur ce système des idées réjouissantes' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 76).

46 'dont le nom est si terrible et l'idée si agréable' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 128).

47 'Je vous demande grâce, s'écria-t-elle, je me rends. Vous m'accablez de Mondes et de Tourbillons' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 146).

48 'La tête me dût-elle tourner, dit-elle en riant, il est beau de savoir ce que c'est que les tourbillons. Achevez de me rendre folle, je ne me ménage plus, je ne connais plus de retenue

For Fontenelle, this regret is primarily a way of allowing a clear view of the erotic nature of the 'emportement' of the Marquise who becomes submerged by the *effets surprenants* of astronomy.⁴⁹ These transports of the mind will be echoed, in Sade, by the exclamations of young Eugénie in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, as she is initiated simultaneously into the theory and practice of libertinage:

Ah! [...] how these seductive words inflame my head and seduce my soul.
I love this answer madly ... Ah! [...] what a mood it puts me in to know these divine outbursts of a disordered imagination.⁵⁰

It is indeed following in the (albeit distant) footsteps of the *Entretiens* that Sade exploits the curiosity of Eugénie ('what does *Matrix* mean?')⁵¹ as an essential mechanism to test philosophy by means of the most radical materialism, and to deploy through phantasm all the particulars of the female anatomy in the panoptic system of the boudoir ('None of the parts of one or other body may be hidden by this means, everything must be in view'⁵²).

Similarly, Julie de Lespinasse in *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, who ingenuously asks the physician Bordeu: 'What do you think of the mixing of species?',⁵³ is clearly following in the footsteps of the Marquise of the *Entretiens* and 'Diderot signs his debt by making her refer to Fontenelle's rose'.⁵⁴ It is by arousing the young woman's *libido sciendi* that the text explores all the consequences of the materialist hypothesis, even (in "La suite de l'entretien précédent") on the most sensitive subject, that of sexual morality. Meanwhile, Suzanne in *La Religieuse* offers probably the most eloquent counter-example of the philosophical and

sur la philosophie; laissons parler le monde, et donnons-nous aux tourbillons. Je ne vous connaissais pas de pareils emportements, repris-je; c'est dommage qu'ils n'aient que les Tourbillons pour objet' (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* 128).

49 I'm referring here to Marivaux's *Les Effets surprenants de la sympathie* (1714).

50 'Ah! [...] comme ces discours séducteurs enflamment ma tête et séduisent mon âme. J'aime à la folie cette réponse ... Ah! [...] quelles dispositions je me sens à connaître ces élans divins d'une imagination dérégulée' Sade Donatien Alphonse François de, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* [1795], ed. M. Delon, in *Œuvres* (Paris: 1998) t. 3, 38 and 50.

51 'que signifie *Matrice*?' (Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* 24).

52 'Aucune des parties de l'un ou l'autre corps ne peut être cachée par ce moyen, il faut que tout soit en vue' (Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* 20).

53 'Que pensez-vous du mélange des espèces?'. Diderot Denis, *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, ed. C. Duflo (Paris: 2005) 169.

54 'Diderot signe sa dette en lui faisant évoquer la rose de Fontenelle'. Delon M., "La Marquise et le philosophe", *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 182 (1981) 68.

emancipatory virtue attributed to women's curiosity. For the monstrous nature of convent life in Diderot's novel consists perhaps above all in that it compels Suzanne to confine herself in an obstinate denial of all curiosity, and to turn constantly inwards in regressive attitudes that keep her in an ill-defined half-way house between childhood and adulthood: 'I know nothing, and I prefer to know nothing, rather than to acquire knowledge that would perhaps make me more piteous than I am. I have no desires at all, and I do not want to seek any that I could not satisfy'.⁵⁵ The complete lack of sexual curiosity constantly displayed by Suzanne is all the more symptomatic in that Diderot too believes that women are 'naturally curious': 'they want to know, either to use or to abuse everything'.⁵⁶ Suzanne 'refuses to allow her eyes to be opened, that language should "name" in all clarity "the thing" to which she lends herself, as otherwise she would be lost'.⁵⁷ This explains her remarkable zeal in obeying the orders of Père Lemoine, who enjoins her to flee horrified from all contact with the Mother Superior of Sainte-Eutrope so as to preserve the ideal innocence of the monastic condition that he reveres in her. But this innocence is probably infinitely more monstrous than the perversion of the lesbian Mother Superior, who at the end of the novel attains an authentically tragic stature.

Not without irony, it is to St. Jerome that Diderot refers, in his *Essai sur les femmes*, to celebrate the 'exoteric' and 'effusive' virtues of female ignorance and curiosity: 'A solitary man, whose ideas were as tempestuous as his expressions, used to say to the heresiarchs of his time: "Turn your attention to women; they receive promptly, because they are ignorant; they circulate with ease, because they are light-headed; they remember for a long time, because they are stubborn"'.⁵⁸ Following in the footsteps of Poulain de La Barre, it is indeed this female virtue of openness and curiosity that Fontenelle has skilfully exploited, as has been rightly emphasised by Claudine Poulouin: "The "philosophy party",

55 'Je ne sais rien, et j'aime mieux ne rien savoir, que d'acquérir des connaissances qui me rendraient peut-être plus à plaindre que je ne suis. Je n'ai point de désirs, et je n'en veux point chercher que je ne pourrais satisfaire' (Diderot Denis, *La Religieuse*, ed. R. Mauzi (Paris: 1972) 209).

56 'elles veulent savoir, soit pour user, soit pour abuser de tout' (Diderot Denis, *Sur les femmes*, in *Œuvres*, ed. L. Versini (Paris: 1995) 1, 950).

57 'refuse qu'on lui ouvre les yeux, que le langage "nomme" en toute clarté "la chose" à laquelle elle se prête, sinon elle serait perdue'. Kofman S., *Séductions, de Sartre à Héraclite* (Paris: 1990) 47.

58 'Un solitaire, brûlant dans ses idées ainsi que dans ses expressions, disait aux hérésiarques de son temps: "Adressez-vous aux femmes; elles reçoivent promptement, parce qu'elles sont ignorantes; elles répandent avec facilité, parce qu'elles sont légères; elles retiennent longtemps, parce qu'elles sont têtues"' (Diderot, *Sur les femmes* 1, 950).

exploiting the natural dispositions of women, will busy itself making the *dévot*e obeying her confessor, the prince's favourite, and the witty women who decorate the salons with their presence, into fearsome "little causes" that will work their way – if I may use this expression – through the different layers of society'.⁵⁹ Furthermore, La Bruyère was not taken in, as so many others were, by a frivolity that was supposed to be basically harmless. It is as a response to the *Entretiens* that a number of fragments in the final selection of *Caractères*, "Des esprits forts", must be read, and particularly this excerpt from fragment 45:

But the Moon is inhabited, or at least it is not impossible that it be so. – What are you saying, Lucile, about the Moon and in what connection? If God is assumed to exist, what is then the impossible thing? You ask perhaps whether we are alone in the universe in being so well treated by God; if there are not on the Moon either other men, or other creatures, that God has also favoured? *Vain curiosity! Frivolous question!* [...] that those who people the celestial globes, whoever they may be, are worried for themselves: they have their cares, and we have ours.⁶⁰

It may admittedly be considered that, in doing so, Fontenelle in turn limits the woman to the stance of a pupil, and that 'it is to the male philosopher that the mastery of this process remains devolved: it is he who produces philosophy and it is he who orchestrates, as producer, the conditions of its circulation in the fictional dialogue'.⁶¹ But the fact that, to designate Fontenelle, La Bruyère

59 'Le "parti de la philosophie", exploitant les dispositions naturelles des femmes, s'emploiera à faire de la dévot>e obéissant à son confesseur, de la favorite du prince et des femmes d'esprit qui font l'ornement des salons, de redoutables "petites causes" qui travailleront, si l'on ose dire, la société dans son épaisseur', Poulouin C., "Qu'est-ce que le 'parti de la philosophie'?", *Revue Fontenelle* 6–7 (2010) 197.

60 'Mais la lune est habitée; il n'est pas du moins impossible qu'elle le soit. – Que parlez-vous, Lucile, de la lune, et à quel propos? En supposant Dieu, quelle est en effet la chose impossible? Vous demandez peut-être si nous sommes seuls dans l'univers que Dieu ait si bien traités; s'il n'y a point dans la lune ou d'autres hommes, ou d'autres créatures que Dieu ait aussi favorisées? Vaine curiosité! frivole demande! [...] que ceux qui peuplent les globes célestes, quels qu'ils puissent être, s'inquiètent pour eux-mêmes; ils ont leur soins, et nous les nôtres', La Bruyère Jean de, *Les Caractères* [1696], "Des esprits forts", § 45, ed. R. Garapon (Paris: 1962). Our italics.

61 'c'est au philosophe mâle que reste dévolue la maîtrise de ce processus: c'est lui qui produit la philosophie et c'est lui qui orchestre, en tant que producteur, les conditions de sa circulation dans le dialogue fictif' (Lotterie, *Le Genre des Lumières* 79).

chose a name that was then generally regarded as feminine (Lucile) should give us food for thought.⁶² It could in fact be argued that, in the remarkably fertile system imagined by Fontenelle, female curiosity is something other than just a convenient means of exotericism of science and philosophy. For it is only on the surface that the exploitation of this curiosity – supposed to be natural for women – assigns to the female sex the exclusive status of *recipient* of the philosophical discourse. Is not what is being celebrated also a *different* and more 'feminine' practice of thought and philosophy, in which availability to the 'outside' plays an essential role and the fertilising element is external to the subject? This suggests that with the *Entretiens*, we are perhaps witnessing – to use the celebrated words of Léo Spitzer about Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* – 'a glorification of the feminine principle in human thought'.⁶³

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anon., *Les Femmes sçavantes ou Bibliothèque des dames qui traite des sciences qui conviennent aux dames, des livres qu'elles peuvent lire et l'histoire de celles qui ont excellé dans les sciences*, M.N.C. (Amsterdam, Michel-Charles Le Cène: 1718).
- Diderot Denis, *La Religieuse*, ed. R. Mauzi (Paris: 1972).
- Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *De l'éducation des filles*, in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, ed. J. Le Brun (Paris: 1983).
- Fontenelle Bernard Le Bouyer de, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. C. Cazanave, in *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, ed. C. Poulouin (Paris: 2013).
- , *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. C. Martin (Paris: 1998).
- Gérard Abbé Armand de, *Les Entretiens de Philémon et de Théandre sur la Philosophie des Gens de Cour, Morale, ou Le Caractère de l'honneste homme et du chrétien* (Paris, Veuve Sébastien Hure: 1682).
- Lesclache Louis de, *Les Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie, et principalement de la morale, ou l'abrégé de cette science* (Paris, Laurent Rondet: 1667).

62 See for example the *Mémoires de Lucile* (Paris, Libraires associés: 1761) or *Lucile, comédie mêlée d'ariettes* of Marmontel (Paris, chez Merlin: 1770). The English translator of La Bruyère's *Characters* actually lifts the ambiguity, translating Lucile by Lucilius (*The Works of Monsieur de La Bruyère* (London, E. Curll and J. Pemberton: 1713), t. 2, 358 ff.).

63 'une glorification du principe féminin dans la pensée humaine', Spitzer L., "À propos de *La Vie de Marianne*, lettre à M. Georges Poulet", in *Études de style*, trans. A. Coulon – M. Foucault – E. Kaufholtz (Paris: 1970) 389.

- Poulain de la Barre François, *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, ed. M.-F. Pellegrin (Paris: 2011).
 Sade Donatien Alphonse François de, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* [1795], ed. M. Delon, in *Œuvres* (Paris: 1998) t. 3.

Secondary Sources

- Delon M., "La marquise et le philosophe", *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 182 (1981) 65–78.
 Hamou P., *La Mutation du visible. Essai sur la portée épistémologique des instruments d'optique au XVII^e siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: 1999).
 Lotterie F., *Le Genre des Lumières. Femme et philosophe au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 2013).
 Martin C., "'La philosophie dans le parc'. *Les Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*: une 'fiction' libertine?", *Revue Fontenelle* 1 (2003) 17–38.
 Pellegrin M.-F., "La science parfaite. Savants et savantes chez Poulain de la Barre", *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3 (2013) 377–392.
 Poulouin C., "Qu'est-ce que le 'parti de la philosophie'?", *Revue Fontenelle* 6–7 (2010) 183–201.
 Timmermans L., *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598–1715). Un débat d'idées de saint François de Sales à la marquise de Lambert* (Paris: 1993).
 Touboul P., "Le statut des femmes: nature et condition sociale dans le traité *De l'éducation des filles* de Fénelon", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 2 (2004) 325–342.

Between Scientific Investigation and Vanity Fair: Reflections on the Culture of Curiosity in Enlightenment France

Adeline Gargam

(trans. Matthew Hylands)

During the Enlightenment, knowledge constituted a sort of *Eldorado* for French women. Many were driven by a rage for learning, maintaining a relationship of intimacy and desire with scientific culture. Women read and educated themselves, wrote and translated, experimented and embraced the culture of curiosity, whether in their cabinets or in scientific expeditions. The culture of curiosity effectively ceased to be an all-male field: from this point on in Europe it was part of women's activity.¹ The present article sets out to study this cultural practice of curiosity among the French women of the Enlightenment – examining its spaces, forms, stakes and functions in order to see how women sometimes made it a Vanity Fair, sometimes a patient and impassioned investigation – and to demonstrate the role of this practice in the construction and spread of the European Enlightenment, or its contribution to the advance of scientific thought.

The Privileged Sanctuaries of the Culture of Curiosity

This culture of curiosity was practised in a plural and international social and geographical framework. Among the privileged spaces was the closed one of the cabinets that proliferated across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.² According to Antoine Dezallier d'Argenville, women's cabinets

1 Gargam A., *Les Femmes savantes, lettrées et cultivées au siècle des Lumières ou la conquête d'une légitimité (1690–1804)* (Paris: 2013) and “Savoirs mondains, savoirs savants: les femmes et leurs cabinets de curiosités au siècle des Lumières”, *Genre et Histoire* (Revue de l'association Mnémosyne) 5 (2009) 1–16. URL: <http://genrehistoire.revues.org/index899.html> (accessed 30 April 2014).

2 Lamy E., *Les Cabinets d'histoire naturelle en France au XVIII^e siècle et le cabinet du roi (1635–1793)* (Paris: 1900); Daumas M., *Les Cabinets de physique au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1951); Taton R.,

were less numerous than those of men, constituting only 3 per cent of the total number in Europe. Of 800 cabinets, 25 were kept by women, among which some 15 were in France.³ But this survey is incomplete, because I have counted at least 46 including 36 in France, of which 24 were in Paris and 12 in the provinces.⁴ These could be grouped into four categories, given that the functions and stakes of the culture of curiosity were not identical for all the women (Table 11.1).⁵

Firstly, there were cabinets of curiosity in the proper sense of the term, fashionable social spaces where curious or impassioned women collected curiosities for their own and visitors' amusement. These cabinets were the most numerous. I have counted 29, including 18 in Paris and 11 in provincial France. In the second category are the experimental cabinets – two of them – comparable to the *studioli* of the Italian Renaissance. These were laboratories closed to the public, where scholarly or cultivated women assembled curiosities for a scientific and experimental purpose. Next come the cabinets of conservation of curiosities, comparable to today's taxidermy workshops. There were three of these in Paris in the second half of the eighteenth century. Women collected curiosities there with a view to their conservation and sale to collectors, in a practice that served as a profession. Finally, there are the cabinets of fabrication of curiosities. Of these I have found only one in Paris, where Mlle Biheron fabricated curiosities for a purpose both pedagogical and lucrative. Some women collectors such as Mmes Bandeville and d'Arconville owned several cabinets. Also, some cabinets correspond to several categories: those of Mmes de Courtagnon and du Châtelet were at once cabinets of

Enseignement et diffusion des sciences en France au XVIII^e siècle (Paris: 1964); Schnapper A., *Le Géant, la licorne et la tulipe. Collections et collectionneurs dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1988); Sorgeloos C., "Les Cabinets d'histoire naturelle et de physique dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens et à Liège", in Isaac M.T. – Sorgeloos C. (eds.), *La Diffusion du savoir scientifique XVI^e–XIX^e siècles* (Brussels: 1996) 125–231; Impey O. – Macgregor A. (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: 1985); Mauriès P., *Cabinets de curiosités* (Paris: 2002); Martin P. – Moncond'huy D. (eds.), *Curiosité et cabinets de curiosités* (Neuilly: 2004); Marrache-Gouraud M. – Martin P. – Moncond'huy D. – Garcia G. (eds.), *La Licorne et le bézoard: Une histoire des cabinets de curiosités* (Paris: 2013).

3 Dezallier d'Argenville Antoine, *L'Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans une de ses parties principales, la conchyliologie* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1757); *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative ou collection de coquilles* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1767); *La Conchyliologie ou histoire naturelle des coquilles* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1780).

4 Cf. note 1 above.

5 Some of these statistics were published in Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes* 117 and "Savoirs mondains" 1–16.

TABLE 11.1 *The various types of cabinets*

	Cabinets of curiosities	Experimental cabinets	Cabinets of conservation of curiosities	Cabinets of fabrication of curiosities
Paris	Mme Bandeville	Mme Thiroux	Mlle Beaudoin	Mlle Biheron
	Mme de Bure	d'Arconville	Mlle Meugnier	
	Mme Dubois-Jourdain	Mme d'Urfé	Mme Grandpré	
	Mme Damery			
	Mme the Superior of La Pitié			
	Mme de Montclair			
	Mme de Valois			
	Mme de La Marck			
	Mme Lecomte			
	Mlle Clairon			
	Mlle Fel			
	Mlle Papillon			
	Mlle Thouin			
	Mlle de Malboissière			
	Mlle de Méliand			
	Mme Escours			
	Mme de Pompadour			
	Mme de Chartres			
Provinces	Mme de Fuligny-Rochechouart	Mme Thiroux d'Arconville		
	Mme Durfort de Civrac			
	Mme Chazot-Duplessy			
	Mme de Courtagnon			
	Mme Bandeville			
	Mme Puyieux			
	Mme Horrebortel			
	Mlle Buténé			
	Mme Lezay-Marnezia			
	Mme Thiroux d'Arconville			
	The Duchess d'Enville			
	Mme du Châtelet			

TABLE 11.2 *Women collectors in the three social orders*

Orders	Number of Women	Percentage
CLERGY	2	5.9%
NOBILITY	10	29.4%
THIRD ESTATE	22	64.7%
TOTAL	34	

curiosity and experimental cabinets. Not all Enlightenment women practised a sedentary culture of curiosity in the closed space of the cabinets. Some made it a mobile activity through their foreign travel. Among these was Jeanne Baret (1740–1816), who dressed as a man for the scientific expedition led by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811). Together with her lover, the naturalist Philibert Commerson (1727–1773), she gathered astonishing natural history collections from the lands and oceans crossed: this material was later conveyed to the Jardin du Roi, where it allowed scientists to formulate descriptions and classifications.⁶

Our research on these women collectors provides some indication of their social standing. Because Ancien Régime society was institutionally structured by orders, I have set out these data on that basis. I have classified the collectors according to their membership of the clergy, the nobility or the Third Estate where this can be determined (Table 11.2).

The eighteenth-century culture of curiosity is said to have been democratised across all three social orders, but the impulse seems primarily to be bourgeois. I have counted only two clerical women – the Superior of La Pitié and the Abbess Dufort de Civrac – or a proportion of 5.9 per cent. With 10 women recorded, the nobility represents 29.4 per cent, including such countesses, duchesses and marquises as Mmes du Châtelet, de Chartres and de La Marck. With 22 representatives, women of the Third Estate formed a clear majority of 64.7 per cent, of whom at least 10 or so, as in the cases of Mlle de Malboissière and Mme Chazot-Duplessy, belong to the administrative or financial bourgeoisie. Others like Mlle Biheron and Mme de Valois come from the commercial bourgeoisie and others again from labour: the actress Mlle Clairon, Mlle Thouin and Jeanne Baret are daughters of gardeners or manual workers.

6 Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes* 145.

It is not inconceivable that these data show a sociological shift under way: an embourgeoisement of the culture of curiosity running parallel, perhaps, to that of the culture in general in the second half of the eighteenth century; a phenomenon that also appears in publication and writing.⁷ The figures also indicate another change, namely the entry of the sciences into the occupations and amusements of Third Estate women, given that the curiosities collected by women were for the most part scientific curiosities. Thus the culture of curiosity was among the occupations of aristocratic, Third Estate and clerical women, but the practice takes on widely varying appearances. While certain women enter into it as dilettantes, others make it a lucrative activity or a scholarly one with a scientific or pedagogical purpose.

Between Exhibition and Democratization

Eclectic Collections of Near-encyclopaedic Scope

In cabinets of the first category, curiosities from the four corners of the world were assembled in keeping with a near-encyclopaedic ambition (see Table 11.3). These highly eclectic collections contained anything from 250 to 1,200 curiosities⁸ and were mostly made up of natural history collections: minerals, shells, animals and plants. The mineral collections were the most extensive, comprising 80 to 97 per cent of the collections. Shell collections also formed a large part, between 17 and 40 per cent. The animal and vegetable worlds were little represented, with zoological collections making up 0.5 to 15 per cent and plants barely 1 per cent. The remainder was comprised of curiosities concerning the history of peoples, religions and armaments.

'Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity'

This craft implies the luxury of a country where the bourgeoisie also possesses an aristocratic wealth, and at the same time a way of life heavily marked by the spirit of *vanitas*. The cabinets house a multitude of objects represented in the preceding century in *vanitas* painting and in the rare still lifes it inspired in the eighteenth century.⁹ Included are a number of curiosities that in the

7 Wittmann R., "Une Révolution de la lecture à la fin du XVIII^e siècle", in Cavallo G. – Chartier R. (eds.), *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental* (Paris: 1997) 331–364; Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes* 1, chap. 3.

8 For these percentages, see Gargam "Savoirs mondains" 4.

9 See Chardin Jean Siméon, *Attributs des Arts / Attributs des Sciences*, 1731, 220 × 140 cm, Musée Jacquemart-André, and *Les Attributs de la musique*, 1765, 91 × 145 cm, Musée du Louvre.

TABLE 11.3 *Content of collections*

Natural history curiosities	MINERALS	Minerals of all countries
		Calcareous, siliceous and volcanic rocks
		Fossils
		Precious stones
		Crystals
		Petrifications
	SHELLS	Shells of marine, fresh-water and land fauna
	ANIMALS	Marine and land animals
		Birds
		Fish
Curiosities relating to the history of peoples, religions and armaments	VEGETABLES	Insects
		Fruits
		Plants
		Grains and roots
Ancient curiosities		Bark and wood pieces
		Clothing and jewellery of various Asian nations
Artistic curiosities		Weapons and war machinery
		Objects of worship
		Busts of gods, mythological heroes and ancient philosophers
		Bronze
		Lamps, vases and ancient weapons
Books		Medals, statues and figurines
		Etchings, reliefs and bas-reliefs
		Curiosities in enamel and in glass, ivory and crystal, earthenware and bronze, wax and terracotta
		Watches and medallions, snuffboxes and rings with precious stones
		Engravings and oil paintings, on stone or in miniature
Musical instruments		Of mathematics, physics, astronomy, history, philosophy, law and jurisprudence
		Organs and pianos, violins and harpsichords
Scientific instruments		Geographical maps and globes
		Telescopes and other glasses
		Microscopes, thermometers, fire pumps and pneumatic machines, hydrostatic balances, intermittent fountains, artificial magnets . . .

paintings connote the vanity of worldly goods: diamonds, jewellery and arms evoke the symbolism of the vanity of wealth and power; books, pictures and scientific instruments connote the vanity of knowledge; snuff boxes and musical instruments that of pleasures. Also to be found are curiosities recalling the fragility and brevity of human life: time-measuring instruments, insects, lamps and candles. In other words, a whole series of curiosities imbued with the spirit of *vanitas* also described at the time in the theatrical fictions of the literary and philosophical salons.¹⁰ Their setting also bespeaks this pictorial universe, incorporating books and scientific instruments, musical accessories (scores and guitars) and amusements (gaming tables and playing cards): attributes apparently seeking to convey the worldly and intellectual vanity of such sites of sociability. Though *vanitas* seems to have passed out of pictorial fashion in the eighteenth century, then, it had by no means disappeared. Its constituency shifted visibly to literary territory, inspiring some playwrights.

Like the salons, these cabinets resemble Vanity Fairs in that they contain objects represented in that pictorial genre and because their owners collected curiosities for an ostentatious rather than a scientific end. The effect sought seems more a matter of aesthetic scruple and of exhibition, affirming and enhancing the women's social standing. They do not make the curiosities an object of study. They collected first for their own amusement, then to exhibit their cabinets to a public of amateurs and the curious. Consequently their reasons for building the collections seem to have less to do with a desire to study them or to interpret their mysteries than with a wish to astonish visitors with the spectacle of forms and colours in a display of apparent or real wealth. It is as though for these women the cultivation of curiosities was a means of self-affirmation and of shining socially or intellectually. After all, the culture of curiosity is supposed to emanate from curiosity – a desire to learn and to extend one's knowledge. So exhibiting collections might be also a way to parade the learning [*lumières*] acquired in making the collection (or at least to feign that learning), in which case this culture of curiosity would amount to a sort of intellectual simulacrum. As Landais put it in the *Encyclopaedia*, 'not all those involved in it are experts [*connaisseurs*], which is what often makes them as ridiculous as those who speak of what they don't understand will always be'.¹¹ Yet a look at the way the collections were organised reveals that some followed

10 Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes* III, chap. 2.

11 'tous ceux qui s'en occupent ne sont pas connaisseurs, c'est ce qui les rend souvent ridicules, comme le seront toujours ceux qui parlent de ce qu'ils n'entendent pas'. See Landais M., "curieux" in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* 3rd ed., 39 t. (Genève, Pellet: 1777–1779) t.10, 174.

the methodical order prescribed by the scientists.¹² This meticulous taxonomy suggests that some of the collectors were no neophytes but cultivated women already aware of the scientific methods required in building a cabinet. Some, such as Mmes Dubois-Jourdain and de Rochechouart, had pursued formal studies in physics and chemistry, natural history and geometry. Pierre Rémy, who published the catalogue of the collections of Mme Dubois-Jourdain, calls her 'taste for natural history' a 'favourite passion to which all others were sacrificed'.¹³ *Vanitas*, therefore, was no longer devoid of scientific interest.

Temples of Knowledge

Though some women collectors practised the culture of curiosity solely for purposes of social and intellectual affirmation, they nonetheless contributed to the making and dissemination of European knowledge. For amateurs as for French and foreign scientists, these cabinets constituted true sanctuaries of knowledge. In the words of the catalogue publisher for the sale of the cabinet of Mme de Bure in 1773, the cabinets 'enrich the City', making it possible to 'travel the four quarters of the Earth, admiring all that is rarest and most useful in Nature'.¹⁴ It is in the boundless treasures of Nature that medicine, chemistry, botany, agriculture [...] find the means of their perfection. Yet nature would pour out her blessings in vain if citizens did not make their collection before our eyes a work of study and a pleasure'.¹⁵

By organizing exhibitions, women allowed amateurs to educate themselves not only in the sciences but also in history – that of art, of peoples, religions and armaments. Several women collectors circulated their curiosities within their personal networks. Geneviève de Malboissière sent her friend Adélaïde de Méliand (1745–1828) doubles of her 'fossil shells'¹⁶ and of plants received

12 Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* 187–199; see Daubenton Louis, "Cabinet" in *Encyclopédie* t. 5, 656–664.

13 'le goût qu'elle avait pour l'histoire naturelle, était chez elle, comme une passion favorite, à laquelle toutes les autres étaient sacrifiées'. See Rémy Pierre, *Catalogue raisonné des curiosités qui composaient le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois Jourdain* (Paris, Didot: 1766) iv.

14 'parcourir les quatre parties de la terre, d'admirer ce que la Nature a de plus rare, de plus utile et de plus flatteur'. See *Catalogue d'une collection de très belles coquilles, madrépores, stalactites... qui composaient le cabinet de feu Madame de B**** (Paris, Didot: 1773) v.

15 'C'est dans les trésors infinis de la Nature [...] que la médecine, la chimie, la botanique, l'agriculture [...] trouvent de quoi se perfectionner [...]. Mais en vain la Nature prodiguerait ses bienfaits, si des citoyens généreux ne se faisaient pas une étude et un plaisir de les ramasser sous nos yeux' (*Catalogue d'une collection de très belles coquilles*, iv–v).

16 Luppé J. de, *Une jeune fille au XVIII^e siècle: Geneviève de Malboissière (1761–1766)* (Paris: 1925) 232.

from other collectors,¹⁷ which suggests that Mlle de Méliand also kept her own cabinet. Mme Dubois-Jourdain exchanged curiosities with foreigners who had previously visited her collections, corresponding with them on natural history.¹⁸ While these exchanges were in part a matter of civility, they nonetheless contributed to the development and increase of interest in natural history within society networks.

Some of these collections were of epistemological interest to scientists, proving useful to their naturalist studies when seen and examined. Certain curiosities allowed them to discover new species: although most were familiar, others were singular, sometimes even unique in their genus. Mme la Présidente Bandeville possessed the only example in France of a certain univalve shell, an engraving of which appears in Dezallier d'Argenville's *Histoire Naturelle*.¹⁹ Among the plates of the *Encyclopaedia* is a drawing of a butterfly owned only by Mme Le Comte.²⁰ These collections allowed naturalists such as Antoine Dezallier d'Argenville, Jean-Étienne Guettard and Carl von Linné (Linnaeus)²¹ to formulate descriptions, analyses and classifications, to distinguish endemic species from others, to compare curiosities and to account for varieties, differences and singularities in animal, vegetable and mineral classes, genera and species. The women collectors, then, were not simply curious: they were real agents of cultural propagation and transmission, contributing not just to the enrichment and deepening of knowledge but also to its democratization among a public of amateurs and readers.

From Investigation to Experiment

Some collectors passed beyond the stage of ostentatious amusement and amateurism to make the culture of curiosity a scholarly activity. Some, that is to say, assembled collections for a scientific purpose. For these women, the culture of curiosity was a matter of patient and impassioned investigation without social or intellectual vanity.

17 Luppé 302.

18 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné* VII–VIII.

19 Dezallier d'Argenville, *Histoire naturelle* 399 [pl. II, figure K].

20 *Recueil de planches sur les sciences et les arts libéraux* 5 (Paris: 1768) 14 [pl. LXXX, figure 2].

21 D'Argenville reports that the cabinet of Christina of Sweden provided Linnaeus with new species to be described in his *Systema naturae*. Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* 362–363.

In Search of New Therapeutic Techniques

Marie-Catherine Le Franc de Courtagnon, Marie-Geneviève Thiroux d'Arconville and Jeanne d'Urfé made the culture of curiosity a matter of medical research and experiment. Mme de Courtagnon's natural history cabinet consisted of several rooms. The first contained a library, the second collections of curiosities and the third an apothecary housing a pharmacy of 500 jars filled with chemical, mineral and vegetable substances (earth, sulphur, bitumen, bark, wood, plants, roots and all kinds of oils and resins) along with a collection of dried plants. In the tradition of the old abbeys, she also cultivated there a garden of medicinal plants.²² Using these products she concocted therapeutic formulas for the free treatment of the poor, in the manner of the wise women who prepared mysterious remedies to cure diseases.²³ But unlike those medicine women who sold their secrets to the people, she concocted these therapies for charitable and philanthropic rather than lucrative ends. Her cabinet was a free medical aid service.

Along with a natural history cabinet, Mme Thiroux d'Arconville (1720–1805)²⁴ had two experimental chemistry laboratories, one on the first floor of her house in Paris and the other a few leagues away in her country house at Meudon or Crosne.²⁵ Unlike those of other collectors, her curiosities consisted mainly of collections of jars in which various substances marinated, some animal (flesh of land and sea animals, human bile, eggs), others vegetable (juices, powders and solutions of plants), still others chemical (compounds and solutions) or

22 Bouteiller M., *Médecine populaire d'hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: 1966) 28.

23 Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes* 1, 92.

24 Girou-Swidorski M.-L., "Vivre la Révolution. L'incidence de la Révolution sur la carrière et la vie de trois femmes de lettres", in *Les Femmes et la Révolution* 2 (Toulouse: 1989) 239–251; Schiebinger L., *The Mind has no Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Harvard: 1991) 247–250; Badinter E., *Les Passions intellectuelles* 2 (Paris: 2002) 251–254; Poirier J.-P., *Histoire des femmes de science en France* (Paris: 2002) 265–273; Seguin M.-S., "Les Femmes et les sciences de la nature", *DHS* 36 (2004) 333–343; Sartori E., *Histoire des femmes scientifiques de l'Antiquité au XX^e siècle* (Paris: 2006) x.; Bardez E., "Au fil de ses ouvrages anonymes, Mme Thiroux d'Arconville", *Revue d'Histoire de la pharmacie* LVII, 363 (2009) 255–266; Bret P., "Madame d'Arconville, femme de sciences au temps des Lumières", *Pour la science* 402 (April 2011) 84–87; Bret P. – Tiggelen B. van (eds.), *Madame d'Arconville: une femme de lettres et de sciences au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: 2011); Gargam A., "La chair, l'os et les éléments. L'heureuse fécondité de la traduction scientifique au XVIII^e siècle: le cas Thiroux d'Arconville", in Leduc G. (ed.), *Les Rôles transfrontaliers joués par les femmes dans la construction de l'Europe, de la Renaissance au XXI^e siècle* (Paris: 2012) 59–75.

25 Girou-Swidorski, "Vivre la Révolution" 239–251; Bardez E., "Au fil de ses ouvrages anonymes" 255–266.

liquid (water, milk, wine). Using these products, she conducted more than 300 experiments on putrefaction between 1755 and 1764, keeping a detailed journal recording dates, times and daily temperature, the substances employed and the experimental methods, along with her observations and conclusions. This was published in 1766 in her *Essai pour servir à l'histoire de la putréfaction*. Mme d'Arconville conducted her experiments for a purpose at once scientific and humanitarian. Her ambition was to formulate a theory of the transformations of matter between the three realms of nature, then to find ways to slow decomposition, conserving putrescible substances by determining whether or not various chemical substances induced the putrefaction of bodies. From this she hoped that 'medicine and surgery would draw certain benefits' in terms of 'the cure of wounds and diseases'.²⁶ Such diseases as gangrene, scurvy and small-pox did enormous damage at the time, primarily in military camps.²⁷ Medical practitioners were interested in these infections that could lead to decomposition of the flesh. Not knowing of the infections' bacterial origins, the doctors sought antiseptic substances to cure them. In England doctors John Pringle and David Macbride had published books on the subject.²⁸ Mme d'Arconville undertook these experiments at the request of her friend Macquer in order to verify Pringle's results, but this experimental work did not yet allow the process of putrefaction to be connected to the presence of micro-organisms; this would come only with the discoveries of Pasteur. Nonetheless she elaborated the basis of the theory in concluding that the putrescible body must be protected from all contamination by living germs.²⁹

The Conquest of the Philosopher's Stone

While Mmes Courtagnon and d'Arconville conducted medical experiments, Jeanne Camus de Pontcarré, Marquise d'Urfé (1705–1775) sought the Philosopher's Stone in her cabinet.³⁰ According to Casanova she was 'known

26 Thiroux d'Arconville Marie-Geneviève, *Essai pour servir à l'histoire de la putréfaction* (Paris, Didot: 1766) XVIII.

27 Berlan H. – Thévenin E., *Médecins et société en France du XVI^e siècle à nos jours* (Toulouse: 2005) IV.

28 John Pringle presented to the Royal Society seven papers on the subject between 1750 and 1752, and in 1753 published *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Camp and Garrison* (London, A. Millar et al.: 1753). David Macbride published in 1764 his *Experimental Essays on the Following Subjects* (London, A. Millar: 1764).

29 Bardez E., "Madame d'Arconville et les sciences", in *Madame d'Arconville* 47–48.

30 Compigny Des Bordes A., *Casanova et la Marquise d'Urfé* (Paris: 1922); Viatte A., *Les Sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme – Théosophie (1770–1820)* 1 (Paris: 1965) 217–223; Casanova Giacomo, *Histoire de ma vie* 2, vol. 5 (Paris: 1993); Stroeve A., *Les Aventuriers*

and recognized as a scholar of all the abstract sciences'.³¹ This great chemist and intellectual was fully conversant with the Kabbala, magic and astrology. But the true object of her devotion – in common with many Freemasons of her time – was alchemy. She was an initiate of the alchemical process, knowing its phases of elaboration and prescribed procedures, specifically those of dissolution and coagulation.³² In her Quai des Théatins residence she built a laboratory closed to the public, because alchemy was a science only for adepts. There she conducted occult science experiments based on substances she had collected. Her laboratory was comprised of an 'an athanor living for 15 years', with 'an interior tower filled with black coal'³³ descending through a 'tube';³⁴ there was also 'a porcelain bowl containing saltpetre, mercury and sulphur',³⁵ a 'plate' with 'fixed salt'³⁶ and 'a barrel filled with *platine del Pinto*'.³⁷ In an 'ivory box' she kept a 'manuscript' by the Catalan mystic 'Raymond Lulle'.³⁸ The purpose of these curiosities was to fabricate the Philosopher's Stone and the Panacea. Indeed, she claimed to have discovered the latter in the course of the transmutation of all metals into gold³⁹ by means of a 'powder of projection'.⁴⁰ In this process she burned various metals to ashes, composing a 'tree of Diana'⁴¹ in the tradition of Paracelsus by mixing and crystallizing 'silver, mercury and spirit of saltpetre'.⁴² Using these products she also concocted such remedies as the 'aroph of Paracelsus',⁴³ a medical substance produced through the sublimation of ammonium salt and red hematite stone⁴⁴

des Lumières (Paris: 1997); Gargam A., "Jeanne d'Urfé", in Krief H. – André V. (eds.), *Dictionnaire des femmes des Lumières* (Paris: 2015), 1173–1176.

- 31 'connue et reconnue pour savante dans toutes les sciences abstraites', Casanova Giacomo, *Mémoires* 2 (Paris: 1959) 110.
- 32 Bonardel F., *La Philosophie de l'alchimie: grand œuvre et modernité* (Paris: 1993).
- 33 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 2, vol. 5, 89.
- 34 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 88.
- 35 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 89.
- 36 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 89. In alchemy, salt (*sal*), sulphur (*sulphur*) and mercury (*mercurius*) are fundamental substances for the transmutation of metals.
- 37 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 88.
- 38 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 88.
- 39 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 87.
- 40 Synonymous with the Philosopher's Stone, the powder of projection ['poudre de projection'] was a powder believed by alchemists to be capable of changing metals into gold in a process of fusion. Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, t. II, vol. v, chap. v, note 7, 87.
- 41 I.e. a 'vegetation of metals'.
- 42 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 89.
- 43 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 161.
- 44 *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (Paris, Libraires associés: 1771) t. I, 517.

for application to renal conditions or menstrual dysfunctions. This she used to interrupt pregnancies.⁴⁵ She also produced potions to cure infections. For smallpox patients she prepared mysterious sachets to be worn as a chain around the neck.⁴⁶ What she sought in these experiments was ‘hypostasis’, or the passage of her soul into the body of a man,⁴⁷ which was thought to open the way to the supreme science and to eternal life. This marquise, then, practised the culture of curiosity with a frenzy close to madness and from a double perspective, at once medical and transcendental.

From Conservation to Commercialization

At the opposite pole from this occultist and mystical form of curiosity, there developed in the 1770s another much more rationalist form, practised as economic activity. Mlle Beaudoin built on the Rue du Bout du Monde a cabinet in which artificial collections of her own devising contained animals from insects and reptiles to fish and quadrupeds. This unmarried woman was a sort of taxidermist *avant la lettre*,⁴⁸ collecting dead animals, protecting their skins and furs from moths and insects and restoring to each its natural posture and living appearance. Very little information is available on her method of conservation, because – so it is said – she guarded its ‘secret’.⁴⁹ Still, some suppositions may be hazarded: the *Avant Coureur Hebdomadaire* mentions in 1768 that she preserved the animals ‘without the help of jars’. At the time only two conservation techniques existed.⁵⁰ The first involved preserving the animals in jars filled with wine-based spirit (ethyl alcohol): Mmes de Rochechouart and Mérode Montfort conserved their curiosities this way. But this practice of conservation in fluid was criticised because although it had the merit of keeping the pieces fresh it also had the fault of depriving the animals of their forms, colours, proportions and natural postures.⁵¹ The second method was that of

45 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 2, vol. 5, 161.

46 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 92.

47 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 99.

48 The term first appears in 1803 in Louis Dufresne, *Le Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*.

49 Fréron Élie-Catherine, *Année Littéraire* (Paris, Lacombe: 1769) 287–288.

50 Péquignot A., “Une peau entre deux feuilles, l’usage de l’herbier en taxidermie aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles en France”, *Revue d’histoire des sciences* 59 (2006) 127–136.

51 Pinel M., “Mémoire sur les moyens de préparer des quadrupèdes et les oiseaux destinés à former des collections d’histoire naturelle”, *Observations sur la physique, la chimie, l’histoire naturelle et les arts* (Paris, Au Bureau du Journal de physique: 1791) 140.

dry conservation using either an oven and a drying loom or a herbarium.⁵² According to the *Année Littéraire* (1769), her method was effective because she was able to protect the curiosities from all foul odours;⁵³ the *Mercure de France* (1769) reports that her pieces also kept their malleability: they could be handled, rotated and easily examined without being broken.⁵⁴ Once prepared, the curiosities were exhibited in her cabinet or sold to Parisian, provincial and foreign collectors. Prices varied by size, species and the animal's country of origin. Quadrupeds were the dearest curiosities, priced twice as high as birds: those coming from Europe cost 6 livres (as did fishes), against 3 livres for European birds; foreign quadrupeds were still more expensive at 10 livres, against 6 livres for foreign birds. Insects were among the cheapest curiosities, costing only 1 livre. The prices were not fixed but proportionate to the size of the animal. For European quadrupeds and birds Mlle Beaudoin applied a price scale based on a unit of 40 sols, proportionate to size. For foreign specimens the unit was 3 livres.⁵⁵ Given that 24 livres made up one gold louis at the time, this meant Mlle Beaudoin had to sell at least four 6-livre curiosities to earn one gold louis.

Her commercial and financial policy bore some resemblance to that of our time. In order to promote and sell her collections she placed advertisements in the press. Her cabinet functioned somewhat as a small import-export business, in that she imported foreign curiosities and exported her own collections. But the curiosities were not exported to the provinces or foreign countries for free. Mlle Beaudoin charged for postage.⁵⁶ She also practised the 'money-back guarantee' method. She promised to exchange or reimburse payment for poorly conserved or deteriorated curiosities where these were returned with the *cachet* or seal, a precursor to the modern checkout receipt.⁵⁷ This practice went beyond the stage of recreational amusement, entering a circuit of lucrative activity whose purpose was to support and enrich those involved. Two other Parisiennes also turned their move into 'taxidermy' to economic ends: Mme Meugnier, working from 1775 on Rue Pastourelle in the Marais district,⁵⁸ and Mme de Grandpré, working on Rue des Prouvaires from 1776.⁵⁹

52 Péquignot, "Une peau entre deux feuilles" 127–136.

53 *Année Littéraire* (1769) 287–288.

54 *Mercure de France* (Paris: 1769) 211.

55 *Journal des Dames* (Paris, Cuissart: July 1767).

56 *L'Avant coureur: feuille hebdomadaire, où sont annoncés les objets particuliers des sciences & des arts, le cours & les nouveautés des spectacles, & les livres nouveaux en tout genre* (Paris, M. Lambert: 1768) 170–171.

57 *Année Littéraire* (1769) 287–288.

58 *Mercure de France* (November 1775) 226; *État de médecine, de chirurgie et de pharmacie en Europe pour l'année 1776* (Paris: 1776).

59 *Journal des Dames* (January 1768) 47.

From Fabrication to Education

This is also true of Marie-Marguerite Biheron (1719–1795). Her cabinet, however, contained various collections of curiosities of anatomical waxwork. Artificial anatomy had captured the imagination of the second half of the eighteenth century: following the example of the Sicilian Zumbo, wax curiosities invaded the cabinets and museums.⁶⁰ Mlle Biheron, raised in a medical milieu,⁶¹ was attracted very early by the natural sciences and medicine. After taking drawing, painting and anatomy classes at the Jardin du Roi, she opened an anatomy cabinet on the Rue de la Vieille Estrapade, where she produced a series of anatomical curiosities representing the various parts of the human body at life size. According to the sale catalogue for her cabinet, in December 1796 her collection contained 129 pieces, drawings and anatomical engravings plus several monstrosities.⁶² Mlle Biheron also made curiosities for foreign collections. At the request of the surgeon Morand, a member of the Academy of Sciences, she produced for Catherine II⁶³ an artificial anatomy representing a woman's body cut short at the extremities, whose interior opened to show the internal organs (viscera, sex organs and membranes), for which she won the approval of the Royal Academy of Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine and the Royal College of Surgery. Her curiosities were made in her *petit boudoir*, another cabinet in her garden. Her moulds and modellings were based on real corpses. According to Morand her working method was unlike that of wax sculptors: she too used 'wax, but with a particular alloy'⁶⁴ whose 'secret' she guarded. According to

60 Lemire M., *Artistes et mortels* (Paris: 1990); *Le Corps en morceaux* (Paris: 1990).

61 Haviland T. – Parish L., "A Brief Account of the Use of Wax Models in the Study of Medicine", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 25 (1970) 60–62; Lemire, *Artistes et mortels* 80–85; Boulinier G., "Une femme anatomiste au siècle des Lumières: Marie-Marguerite Biheron (1719–1795)", *Histoire des sciences médicales* 35 (2001) 411–423; Gargam A., "Marie-Marguerite Biheron et son cabinet d'anatomie: une femme de science et une pédagogue", in Brouard-Arends I. – Plagnol-Diéval M.-E. (eds.), *Femmes éducatrices au siècle des Lumières: discours et pratiques* (Rennes: 2007) 147–156; Dacome L., "Une 'dentelle très bien agencée et très précise': Les femmes et l'anatomie dans l'Europe du XVIII^e siècle", in Gargam A. (ed.), *Femmes de sciences de l'Antiquité au XIX^e siècle* (Dijon: 2014) 157–176.

62 *Acte de vente du 13 décembre 1796 après étude du citoyen Boulard, notaire à Paris*. Archives nationales AJ/16/65/63 (coll. Biheron); *Documents de l'an IV et de l'an V, concernant le cabinet d'anatomie de la citoyenne Biheron, décédée*, Archives nationales AJ/16/ 65/63 (coll. Biheron).

63 Morand Sauveur, *Catalogue des pièces d'anatomie, instruments, machines qui composent l'arsenal de chirurgie formé à Paris pour la chancellerie de Saint-Petersbourg* (Paris, Imprimerie Royale: 1759).

64 Morand, *Catalogue des pièces d'anatomie* 29–32.

Diderot and Mme de Genlis she used ribbon, silk, wool, thread, feathers and a palette of coloured waxes; she mixed the colours herself.⁶⁵ Scientists declared her method incomparably effective. Anatomists normally made wax-based pieces that tended to 'turn yellow' and 'break'⁶⁶ with time and heat. Mlle Biheron's pieces kept all their 'colour' and flexibility without becoming fragile.⁶⁷ The alloy used also allowed her to express the proportions, depths and contours of the anatomical pieces. Morand wrote that no other anatomist reached 'such a high point of perfection' or succeeded in 'copying nature' so 'cleanly' and 'precisely'.⁶⁸ Add the stench and the resemblance would be perfect.⁶⁹ Her collections could be visited for 3 livres every day except Sundays and holidays. Thus Mlle Biheron also benefited financially from her work. Her fame was such that foreigners came to visit her collections or to witness her demonstrations: in March 1771 king Gustav III of Sweden attended one at the Academy of Sciences.⁷⁰ Later, prince Ivan Bariatinski negotiated the purchase of her collections for the empress of Russia.⁷¹

For Mlle Biheron the culture of curiosity had an experimental function. Her intention was not to concoct pieces in the manner of the wax sculptors – in other words to standardize anatomical models – but to test new procedures, providing the study and practice of anatomy, surgery and obstetrics with new bases of learning. Like the philosophers of her time, she wanted to popularize her knowledge in order to educate her contemporaries. In this sense too her approach was pedagogical. And she made her cabinet a genuine school,⁷² organizing demonstrations and public courses which in Diderot's words made anatomy 'a common science'⁷³ among her contemporaries. Her training programme lasted a week and according to Diderot and d'Alembert was far superior to that of Antoine Ferrein at the Jardin du Roi.⁷⁴ She also had many disciples:

-
- 65 Diderot Denis, *Mémoires pour Catherine II, Œuvres complètes* 10 (Paris: 1971) 714–715; Genlis Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis* 1 (Paris: 1825) 290–292.
 - 66 Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine* 714–715; Morand, *Catalogue des pièces d'anatomie* 29–32.
 - 67 Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine* 714–715.
 - 68 Morand, *Catalogue des pièces d'anatomie* 29–32.
 - 69 Genlis, *Mémoires inédits* 291.
 - 70 Grimm Friedrich Melchior et alii, *Correspondance Littéraire, philosophique et critique*, IX (April 1771) 275–276.
 - 71 Diderot, *Correspondance* XIV, eds. Roth G. and Varloot J. (Paris: 1964) 46.
 - 72 Gargam "Marie-Marguerite Biheron et son cabinet d'anatomie" 147–156.
 - 73 'une science commune' (Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II* 612–617).
 - 74 Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II* 612–617.

men of letters (Louis Sébastien Mercier, Louis Petit de Bachaumont), encyclopaedists (Grimm, d'Alembert, Diderot) and scientists (Pringle, Petit) along with society women and their daughters, as in the case of Mme de Genlis. It is worth considering whether our anatomist influenced this woman of letters in her princely pedagogy, notably in the use of curiosities as educational tool and support. Mlle Biheron appears to have been '50 years old'⁷⁵ when she taught Mme de Genlis, which would place the courses in the 1770s. Mme de Genlis became 'official governess' to the family of the Duke of Chartres – responsible for the upbringing of the children of the brother of Louis XVI – in 1782. The next year she had the ingenious mechanical engineers Jacques Constantin and Augustin-Charles Périer construct a series of 13 models illustrating the tools and utensils of artisans, industrial producers and scientists.⁷⁶ Among them is a model of a chemistry laboratory based on the plates of the *Encyclopaedia* and representing a collection of scientific instruments, supported by commentary to stimulate her pupils' observation. This teaching method was original in that Mme de Genlis used these virtual collections to introduce the culture of curiosity into the education not of adults but of children.

In the eighteenth century the culture of curiosity was no doubt bound up with a broad European effect of fashion and a desire for social and intellectual affirmation. Yet even as this fashion pervaded the culture, it responded to what Roger Chartier – speaking of readers – called a 'horizon of expectation':⁷⁷ in other words a desire, a demand, located here under the sign of social curiosity. This social demand might perhaps be explained economically: the increasing role of money in the culture and production of curiosities in the eighteenth century should not be underestimated. The potential profit for collectors, traders, publishers and French society more broadly in terms of economic growth doubtless contributed to the growing interest in the culture of curiosity and speeded its development.

For all that, women's motive for cultivating curiosity was not simply superficial and mimetic, something as petty as the attraction of fame. The various instances examined here show that this culture could equally derive from impassioned taste, philanthropic fervour or true scientific curiosity. All these sources coexist and resist reduction to a single motive. Though most of the women collectors may have envisaged the culture of curiosity from the

75 Genlis, *Mémoires inédits* 290.

76 Burger J., "Les Maquettes de Mme de Genlis", *Les Carnets* (October 2002) 1–8.

77 'un horizon d'attente', Chartier R., "Alltägliches Schreiben und Lesen. Modelle und Praktiken des Briefschreibens im Frankreich des Ancien Régime", *Leipziger Jahrbuch zur Buchgeschichte* 2 (1992) 11–34.

standpoint of an amateur pastime, it would be reductive to present them as simple passive sponges of circulating knowledge. By means of their collections, each in her way accelerated and reinforced the process of the democratization of culture. In this sense they can legitimately be seen as dynamic cultural agents. Perhaps not all of them contributed to scientific progress, but all played a role in it that cannot be dismissed, participating to a greater or lesser degree in the century's advancement of scientific thought.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Acte de vente du 13 décembre 1796 après étude du citoyen Boulard, notaire à Paris.* Archives nationales AJ/16/65/63 (coll. Biheron) et *Documents de l'an IV et de l'an V, concernant le cabinet d'anatomie de la citoyenne Biheron, décédée*, Archives nationales AJ/16/65/63 (coll. Biheron).
- Avant coureur: feuille hebdomadaire, où sont annoncés les objets particuliers des sciences & des arts, le cours & les nouveautés des spectacles, & les livres nouveaux en tout genre* (Paris, M. Lambert: 1768).
- Casanova Giacomo, *Histoire de ma vie*, ed. F. Lacassin (Paris: 1993).
- Catalogue d'une collection de très belles coquilles, madrépores, stalactites... qui composaient le cabinet de feu Madame de B**** (Paris, Didot: 1773).
- Dezallier d'Argenville Antoine, *L'Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans une de ses parties principales, la conchyliologie* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1757).
- , *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative ou collection de coquilles* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1767).
- , *La Conchyliologie ou histoire naturelle des coquilles* (Paris, Guillaume de Bure: 1780).
- Diderot Denis, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. R. Lewinter, 15 vols. (Paris: 1969–1973).
- Fréron Élie-Catherine, *Année Littéraire* (Paris, Lacombe: 1769).
- Genlis Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis* (Paris: 1825).
- Grimm Friedrich Melchior et alii, *Correspondance Littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. M. Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris: 1878).
- Journal des Dames* (Paris, Cuissart: July 1767 and January 1768).
- Mercure de France* (Paris: 1769 and 1775).
- Morand Sauveur, *Catalogue des pièces d'anatomie, instruments, machines qui composent l'arsenal de chirurgie formé à Paris pour la chancellerie de Saint-Pétersbourg* (Paris, Imprimerie royale: 1759).

Rémy Pierre, *Catalogue raisonné des curiosités qui composaient le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain* (Paris, Didot: 1766).

Thiroux d'Arconville Marie-Geneviève, *Essai pour servir à l'histoire de la putréfaction* (Paris, Didot: 1766).

Secondary Sources

Bouludier G., "Une femme anatomiste au siècle des Lumières: Marie-Marguerite Bihéron (1719–1795)", *Histoire des sciences médicales* 35 (2001) 411–423.

Dacome L., "Une 'dentelle très bien agencée et très précise': Les femmes et l'anatomie dans l'Europe du XVIII^e siècle", in Gargam A. (ed.), *Femmes de sciences de l'Antiquité au XIX^e siècle* (Dijon: 2014) 157–176.

Daumas M., *Les Cabinets de physique au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1951).

Gargam A., *Les Femmes savantes, lettrées et cultivées au siècle des Lumières ou la conquête d'une légitimité (1690–1804)* (Paris: 2013).

———, "Savoirs mondains, savoirs savants: les femmes et leurs cabinets de curiosités au siècle des Lumières", *Genre et Histoire* (Revue de l'association Mnémosyne) 5 (2009) 1–16.

———, "Marie-Marguerite Bihéron et son cabinet d'anatomie: une femme de science et une pédagogue", in Brouard-Arends I. – Plagnol-Diéval M.-E. (eds.), *Femmes éducatrices au siècle des Lumières: discours et pratiques* (Rennes: 2007) 147–156.

Haviland T. – Parish, L., "A Brief Account of the Use of Wax Models in the Study of Medicine", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 25 (1970) 52–75.

Impey O. – Macgregor A. (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: 1985).

Lamy E., *Les Cabinets d'histoire naturelle en France au XVIII^e siècle et le cabinet du roi (1635–1793)* (Paris: 1900).

Lemire M., *Artistes et mortels* (Paris: 1990).

Marrache-Gouraud M. – Martin P. – Moncond'huy D. – Garcia G. (eds.), *La Licorne et le bézoard: Une histoire des cabinets de curiosités* (Paris: 2013).

Martin P. – Moncond'huy D. (eds.), *Curiosité et cabinets de curiosités* (Neuilly: 2004).

Mauriès P., *Cabinets de curiosités* (Paris: 2002).

Schnapper A., *Le Géant, la licorne et la tulipe. Collections et collectionneurs dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1988).

Sorgeloos C., "Les Cabinets d'histoire naturelle et de physique dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens et à Liège", in Isaac M.T. – Sorgeloos C. (eds.), *La Diffusion du savoir scientifique XVI^e–XIX^e siècles* (Bruxelles: 1996) 125–231.

Taton R., *Enseignement et diffusion des sciences en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1964).

Virtuoso or Naturalist? Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland

Beth Fowkes Tobin

When Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, the second Duchess of Portland, one of Britain's wealthiest women, died in 1785 at the age of 70, the London newspapers were filled with gossip about her will, her heirs, and what would happen to her extensive collections of decorative and natural objects.



ILLUSTRATION 12.1 *Lauren Nassef, "The Duchess of Portland", Pencil on paper, 2010.*

She had collected objects of great beauty and rarity – Japanese porcelain, French snuffboxes, Italian cameos, Roman statuary and other antiquities – but her great love was natural history. She collected minerals, fossils, insects, corals, and thousands of shells. When the news soon spread that all would be sold at auction, rumors circulated about her having bankrupted herself purchasing natural history specimens and *objets d'art* and the need for an auction to refill the ducal coffers. These rumors proved to be untrue; she had simply stipulated in her will that the auction's proceeds were for the benefit of her younger children as her first son would inherit her several residences and estates. The auction was held in the spring of 1786, it having taken the executors and auctioneers nine months to inventory, organize, and describe her collections. Advertised daily in the newspapers, the auction, lasting 38 days, was a spectacular event, drawing hundreds of people who gladly crowded into her Whitehall townhouse to see her things and to watch the action as antiquarians, connoisseurs, and natural history brokers and collectors outbid each other in quest of the rare and beautiful.

Of her collecting practices, W.S. Lewis, himself a collector of Horace Walpole's letters and manuscripts, wrote in 1936: 'Few men have equaled Margaret Cavendish Holles Harley, Duchess of Portland, in the mania of collecting, and perhaps, no woman. In an age of great collectors she rivaled the greatest'.¹ Lewis's use of the word 'mania' is surprising considering he himself was a bibliophile and collector of eighteenth-century manuscripts, letters, and print culture, and one would assume he might have shown more sympathy for her activities. Clearly, there is more than a hint of admiration in Lewis's statement for the scale on which she operated. His statement bears scrutiny because in praising the scale of her collecting, one that Lewis ultimately approved of, he links collecting on the grand scale with 'mania', a passionate commitment that is usually, in Lewis's mind, reserved for men. He is praising her for behaving like a man, and indeed, she could afford to behave like a man in the economic sense as she was an heiress of independent and considerable means and she could do as she liked, especially once she became a widow. But there is more to Lewis's 'compliment' as it contains an assumption about gender and the emotional and intellectual tenor of the collector's engagement with the collected object. 'Mania', in Lewis's analysis, is reserved for men, a displacement of libidinal energies from procreative and productive acts onto objects, which, in the case of natural history collecting, were often dead animal and plant specimens. Whether or not Lewis intended to suggest that men

1 Lewis W.S., "Introduction", *The Duchess of Portland's Museum by Horace Walpole* (New York: 1936) v.



ILLUSTRATION 12.2 Charles Grignion after E.F. Burney, Frontispiece of A Catalogue of the Portland Museum (London, s.n.: 1786).

only can be fetishists, he certainly suggests that an obsessive and passionate possessiveness is usually associated with a male form of collecting. Ultimately what is at stake in Lewis's linkage of mania with collecting on a grand scale is the distinction between two different libidinal economies, one based on disavowal and displacement and the other on incorporation, and that the psychic techniques of displacement are reserved for men and apparently only a very few 'aberrant' women.

In concert with the observations made by Adeline Gargam in her analysis of the spectrum of collecting practices that French women engaged in, spanning the scientific to the decorative, I offer a case study, asking if gender plays a role in the different modalities of collecting.² To answer this question, I canvas twentieth-century theories of collecting with the aim of trying to categorize the various kinds of collecting practices Margaret Cavendish Bentinck engaged in, focusing primarily on her interest in natural history. What criteria do we bring to bear against the question of whether there are qualitative differences between kinds of collecting? Is it the object itself – a Japanese porcelain vase or a bird skin complete with its feathers – that distinguishes one modality of collecting from another? Does the vase's status as a decorative object turn the collecting of it into an act of connoisseurship, and likewise does collecting a bird carcass turn that act into scientific practice? Or are the collector's methods of acquisition and principles of selection more central to making distinctions between kinds of collecting? I suggest that it is possible to collect shells as a connoisseur and to collect shells as naturalist, but what the same shells signify and how they would operate in the world can be very different. To understand how the duchess's collecting practices could encompass both connoisseurship and scientific inquiry requires a careful analysis of the different kinds of collecting she engaged in. Comparing the duchess's methods and goals for her shell collection with other forms of natural history collecting that she engaged in, particularly her acquisition of rare plants and animals, this essay seeks to demonstrate the range and complexity within Enlightenment practices of collecting.

Some of the Duchess of Portland's collecting practices can be explained as a product of her aristocratic heritage and family traditions. Born in 1715, Margaret Cavendish Holles Harley inherited her mother's vast fortune and her family's passion for collecting.³ Her father, Edward Harley, the 2nd Earl of

² See Gargam's chapter in this volume.

³ See, in this volume, Cottagnies' discussion of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, who was Margaret Cavendish Bentinck's great-grandfather's second wife. The Duchess of Newcastle was childless and therefore not a blood relation to the Duchess of Portland. For

Oxford (1689–1741), amassed one of the finest collections of medieval manuscripts, and when he died, Lady Margaret arranged for Parliament to buy his collection of over 7,000 manuscripts at a much reduced price. The Harleian Collection with its Anglo-Saxon psalters, medieval gospels, European courtly romances, and medical and alchemical treatises is one of the founding collections of what is now the British Library. Her mother, Henrietta Cavendish Harley, the Countess Dowager of Oxford, according to Horace Walpole, ‘assembled a prodigious Collection of portraits of her Ancestors, & had reserved the fine Miniatures, Enamels, & Vases of crystal &c all which She left as Heirlooms to her Daughter & her Descendants’. Walpole, a good friend of Lady Margaret’s, described her early forays into collecting:

At first her Taste was chiefly confined to Shells, Japan & old China, particularly the blue & white with a brown Edge, of which last sort She formed a large Closet at Bulstrode; but contented herself with one specimen of every pattern She could get, it was a collection of odd pieces.

Walpole’s account of the duchess’s collecting practices, bound with his annotated copy of the auction catalogue, describes how she ‘laid out a great part’ of her inheritance from her mother of £8,000 a year, on ‘her Menagerie & flower-garden at Bulstrode, & indulging her taste for Virtù, sparing no expence to gratify it for about thirty years, her own purchasing costing her not less than threescore thousand pounds’. In the 1750s she bought paintings, of which Walpole snidely says, ‘She did not understand’, and then ‘Latterly She went deeply into natural history, & her Collection in that Walk was supposed to have cost her fifteen thousand pounds’.⁴

Described as ‘the paradigmatic aristocratic woman collector of the eighteenth century’,⁵ Margaret Cavendish, once she had married William Bentinck, 2nd Duke of Portland (1709–1762), took up the task of turning his country estate, Bulstrode, into a proper ducal residence. She oversaw the building of an aviary, a menagerie, hothouses, and botanic gardens filled with rare and beautiful zoological and botanical specimens. Such activities were fashionable and a sign of elite status. Her personal wealth and high social rank exempted

the Cavendish name, see K. Retford, “Patrilineal Portraiture? Gender and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century Country House”, in Styles J. – Vickery A. (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830* (New Haven – London: 2006) 315–344.

4 Walpole Horace, *The Duchess of Portland’s Museum*, ed. W.S. Lewis (New York: 1936) 5–7.

5 Shteir A.B., *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England, 1760–1860* (Baltimore: 1996) 47.

her from the kinds of critiques that were lodged at women who took an interest in natural history collecting. As Neil Kenny argues, high social rank could mitigate aspersions cast against 'curious' women.⁶ Her peers Hon. Jane Barrington, Lady Hume, Hon. Dowager Lady De Clifford, and Lady Shelburne collected exotic tropical plants to grow in their hothouses and 'stoves' while her friends Lord and Lady Bute took active interest in raising North American trees and shrubs on the grounds of their princely estate, Luton Park, and Lady Bute, like the duchess, enjoyed collecting shells and Lady Fane made a shell grotto. In keeping with this aristocratic tradition of collecting rare and beautiful plants and animals, the duchess owned a vast array of live birds, which were housed in Bulstrode's menagerie and aviary. According to Caroline Powys who visited Bulstrode in July 1769, the menagerie contained many beautiful larger birds, storks, pheasants, bustards, and goons, while the aviary contained 'a most beautiful collection of smaller birds – tumblers, waxbills, yellow and bloom paraquets, Java sparrows, Loretta bluebirds, Virginia nightingales, and two widow-birds, or, as Edward calls them "red-breasted long-twit'd finches"'.⁷ On the grounds of Bulstrode roamed exotic animals, including a Java hare and a zebu bull, both of whom were drawn by Mary Delany, the duchess's dear friend and companion in their widowhoods. Delany describes Bulstrode as a kind of paradise:

This place is now in its full beauty, and if any situation can bear a resemblance to Paradise it is this. The variety of creatures (in perfect agreement) and vegetables are a constant scene of delight and amusement, besides the good taste in which all the improvements are laid out. It has as much magnificence as is necessary, with every elegance and comfort that can be wish'd for, such as everybody must approve and enjoy [...] A curious and enquiring mind can't fail of being gratified [...] at Bulstrode, with *every branch* of virtù.⁸

Margaret Cavendish Bentinck's interest in collecting rare birds and cattle breeds can be understood as enacting her cultural heritage, which was one of aristocratic expenditure and display, and as a way to enhance the visual splendor

6 See Kenny's chapter in this volume.

7 Powys Caroline, *The Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys*, ed. E.J. Climençon (London: 1899) 120–121.

8 Mary Delany to Rev. John Dewes, Bulstrode, 9 July 1778, in Delany Mary, *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover (London: 1861–1862) 6 vols., 5: 363–364.

of her ducal residence and to arouse curiosity and interest in visitors, some of whom were her friends and acquaintances while others, like the Powys family, were country house tourists. Elizabeth Montagu suggested to her cousin that he visit Bulstrode on his tour of country houses in Buckinghamshire: 'I believe menagerie at Bulstrode is exceedingly well worth seeing, for the Dutchess of Portland is as eager in collecting animals, as if she foresaw another deluge, and was assembling every creature after its kind, to preserve the species'.⁹ Her playful and hyperbolic portrait of Bulstrode's animal life, though meant to be taken ironically, suggests that the duchess's desire to possess the natural 'world in toto' put her in competition with Noah. The duchess's quest for botanical and zoological rarities can be understood as participating in this long tradition of European aristocratic collecting of exotic plants, birds, and animals, a form of collecting that Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann argues operates on a symbolic level by representing 'the world in microcosm'.¹⁰

In addition to collecting live animals for her aviaries and gardens, she also collected dead animals – stuffed birds, pinned butterflies and beetles, and the empty shells of dead mollusks. Of the 4,156 lots for sale at the Portland Museum auction, approximately 700 lots contained insects, minerals, and ores, but the overwhelming majority of lots, more than 2,000 lots, consisted of shells with each lot containing anywhere from one to a dozen shells. According to Thomas Martyn, author of *The Universal Conchologist* (1784–1789), the duchess had the largest and finest shell collection in Britain, if not all of Europe:

The first praise is confessedly due to the superb collection of the Dutchess Dowager of Portland; so rich a display in the number as well as rarity and perfection of these subjects, together with species of marine productions, perhaps is not to be equalled. In this branch of science her Grace's superior knowledge is as well known as it is eminently demonstrated, in the critical arrangement of this immense cabinet, which altogether justifies the very great expense of time and money employed in the formation of it.¹¹

9 Elizabeth Montague to her cousin Gilbert West, Sandleford, 25 October 1753, in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu* (London: 1825) 2: 269.

10 Kaufmann T.D., "From Treasury to Museum: The Collections of the Austrian Habsburgs", in Elsner J. – Cardinal R. (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1994) 142.

11 Martyn Thomas, *The Universal Conchologist* (Great Marlborough Street, London; Sold at his House: 1784–1789) 11.

Her shell collection contained exotic shells from all over the globe brought to her as gifts by naval officers, Captains Cook and Clerke for instance, and other seafaring gentlemen who had traveled to China, South Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the West Indies. She also purchased shells from natural history dealers, George Humphrey primarily, and she traded with other naturalists as well as borrowing and loaning specimens for the purposes of identification within a small group of trusted correspondents. She also gathered live mollusks herself tramping around the wet grasses on her estate, looking for land snails, and swooping up tiny bivalves that clung to reedy plants in stream beds. She also traveled to Weymouth's seashore and dug for clams in the sand, examined rock pools for snails, and oversaw dredging operations for scallop shells in its shallow seas, finding several new species this way.

Called a magpie and a bowerbird,¹² the duchess has been treated in a less than flattering light by cultural critics and historians of science, who have portrayed her collections as a 'jumble' of disparate items with little coherence, order, or meaning to them.¹³ Negative depictions of natural history collectors has a long lineage, dating from the seventeenth century with satiric portraits of virtuosi as obsessed collectors of bizarre, obscure, and disgusting objects, beginning with Thomas Shadwell's Sir Nicholas Gimcrack in the play *The Virtuoso*. Often portrayed as anti-social, the virtuoso was mocked for substituting things for people. In Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780), Lady Frances's father, a virtuoso, for instance, 'kept her locked up with his caterpillars and shells and loved her beyond anything – but a blue butterfly and a petrified frog'.¹⁴ Hinted at in these portraits is the idea that collectors were engaged in a perverted and deviant economy of accumulation, perverse because they collected objects rather than money or land, and deviant because they took objects out of economic circulation, diverting them from the so-called rational world of commodity exchange, and inserted them into the affective realm of curiosity. This stereotype of the virtuoso has found its way into present-day depictions of eighteenth-century natural history collectors. As Craig Hanson has observed, 'all too often, in fact, twentieth-century commentators simply followed the scripts established by the early modern critics of the virtuosi,

12 Allen D.E., *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* [1976] (Princeton: 1994) 25.

13 Pascoe J., *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca: 2006) 64.

14 Cowley H., *The Belle's Stratagem*, quoted by Nandini Battacharya, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Connoisseurship: Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literary Transnationalism* (Burlington – Aldershot: 2006) 105.

with little judicious evaluation of their own'.¹⁵ The duchess's wide array of collected objects has subjected her to interpretations that have worked to dismiss her activities as mere accumulation without any guiding principle other than 'mindless horder's lust'.¹⁶

To distinguish accumulating from collecting, I turn to Baudrillard's "System of Collecting", in which he argues that it is seriality that turns an accumulation into a collection.

It should be stressed that the concept of collecting (from the Latin *colligere*, to select and assemble) is distinct from that of accumulating. The latter – the piling up of old papers, the stockpiling of items of food – is an inferior stage of collecting, and lies midway between oral introjection and anal retention. The next stage is that of the serial accumulation of identical objects. Collecting proper emerges at first with an orientation to the cultural: it aspires to discriminate *between* objects, privileging those which have some exchange value or which are also 'objects' of conservation, of commerce, of social ritual, of display – possibly which are even a source of profit. While ceaselessly referring to one another, they admit within their orbit the external dimension of social and human intercourse.¹⁷

In other words, discriminating between similar objects is the dynamic at the heart of collecting. According to Susan Pearce, items in collections that lack seriality can be arranged in any way that pleases the possessor: 'the personality of the collector, in a very particular sense, is the mainspring of this kind of collecting activity and runs beneath much collection-forming'. This is true of collections such as Sigmund Freud's antiquities, mostly small figurines dating from Roman and pre-Roman times, and Walter Benjamin's book collection, both of which are 'presented in a more intellectual, dignified and objective light', disguising these self-aggrandizing forms of accumulation as sophisticated and tasteful. In contrast to these dignified forms of accumulation, a systematic collection is about seriality and operates through recontextualization, with objects organized in relation to each other and arranged along some

15 Hanson C.A., *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago: 2009) 8.

16 Allen D.E., *The Naturalist in Britain* (Harmondsworth: 1978) 30, quoted in Vane-Wright R.I. – Hughes W.H., *The Seymour Legacy* (Tresaith, Cardigan: 2005) 29.

17 Baudrillard J., "The System of Collecting", trans. R. Cardinal, in Elsner – Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* 7–24, 22.

scheme that exists outside the individual collector's mind, usually illustrating a socially agreed upon conceptual system and designed to demonstrate a point.¹⁸

Drawing on Baudrillard's and Pearce's emphasis on seriality and external schema as key to collecting, how do we categorize the duchess's various forms of collecting? For instance, can we distinguish between her shell collection and the collecting of live birds to fill an aviary? Both involve acquiring animal bodies, but the former possesses seriality and is structured around Linnaean systems of classification while the latter can be understood as a residual social practice derived from early-modern cabinets of curiosity and *Wunderkammeren*, forms of accumulation that were designed to enhance and extend a 'possessive self'. Pearce argues that gentleman collectors like Hans Sloane, who had inherited the 'Renaissance world-view of the collection as cosmos in miniature', acquired collections that lacked 'an intellectual rationale by which the material and its acquisition was informed'. Though Freud's, Benjamin's, and Sloane's collections are presented as dignified and intellectual pursuits, this mode of accumulation Pearce calls fetishistic as it is 'a strategy of desire' and 'a deployment of the possessive self'. This kind of collecting is easily parodied (Sir Nicholas Gimcrack), and yet, as Pearce attests, 'much of the material in all of these collections has always been valued for its perceived intrinsic, and therefore financial quality, and has been taken correspondingly seriously by the museums which hold it'. Recipients of centuries of this kind of collecting are today's great natural history museums, London's Museum of Natural History, the British Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, the Field Museum, as well as the smaller museums and historical societies that store and display natural history collections. This fetishistic or connoisseurial mode of collecting is to be distinguished from systematic collecting, which functions to illustrate a system of thought, which, in the case of the Linnaean taxonomy, hinges on the 'ability to compare and contrast collected specimens in order to distinguish the fine detail which divides one species from another, and so carry out identifications'.¹⁹

Returning to the question of gender and different modalities of collecting, the trope of women as accumulators rather than proper collectors recurs in histories and theories of collecting. Women collectors are often portrayed as accumulators whose acquisitions are impulsive, random, obsessive, and without reason. Using words like bowerbird to describe the duchess's collecting and words like hoarder to describe natural history collecting in the Enlightenment are ways of reducing to mere accumulation the complex practices involving

18 Pearce S.M., *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C.: 1992) 81.

19 Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections* 81, 78, 81, 84.

labor and knowledge that were required to build a collection such as the duchess's shell collection. In terms of psychosocial theories of human development, mere accumulation is akin to 'oral injection' as Baudrillard puts it. Women collectors have also been depicted as consumers of exotic luxury goods – porcelain and other ceramics most associated with femininity. This kind of collecting is slightly more elevated in the psychosocial schema, where displaying the purchased object becomes a way in which to enhance and extend one's identity. Such is the conclusion of Rémy Saisselin's study of nineteenth-century French consumption: 'women were perceived as mere buyers of bibelots. [...] Women were consumers of objects; men were collectors. Women bought to decorate and for the sheer joy of buying, but men had a vision for their collections, and viewed their collections as an ensemble with a philosophy behind it'.²⁰ The ability to organize a collection around a concept was thought to be limited to men of a certain class. In short, women were perceived as unable to think in abstract ways or to perform the more complex cognitive functions required by making distinctions within a series of similar objects. For a person to be viewed as a collector, that person's collection must be engaged in representation, the collected object must function within a semiotic system that is organized around distinctions within the 'serial accumulation of identical objects'.

If seriality and making distinctions between similar objects are key to determining whether a collection is merely an accumulation or if it is indeed truly a collection, then the Duchess of Portland's natural history collections are 'proper' collections. She was well versed in Linnaean systematics, she could identify her zoological and botanical specimens using Linnaean taxonomies, and she organized her shell and insect collections by genus and species. The duchess was adept at identifying the specimens' taxa, a practice that involved comparing the collected object with verbal and visual representations of it in various reference books, some of which were organized along Linnaean categories. Classification for shell and insect collectors usually meant working indoors, since shells were often delicate and easy to lose and insects were so small that they had to be viewed through a microscope, and the reference books were often large-format catalogues, too expensive and heavy to carry outdoors, as one might find a field guide. Classification took place in a variety of indoor spaces, including libraries, drawing rooms, breakfast rooms, sitting rooms, and closets. Naturalists were surrounded by shells on table tops, desk tops, and other available surfaces, and on sorting trays and in little boxes and patty pans (cupcake tins). This was often a social activity that involved conferring with friends, exchanging information and guesses about the species of

20 Rémy Saisselin R., *Bricolbracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick: 1984) 68.

new and unnamed specimens. The duchess performed these activities in the presence of visiting naturalists, such as Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, and Daniel Solander, premier taxonomist and curator at the British Museum, as well as interested members of her household, including Mary Delany, the Rev. John Lightfoot, and even her gardener Thomas Agnew.

By the early 1770s the Duchess of Portland was using Linnaean binomial nomenclature (genus and species) and Linnaean descriptions of the shell's and insect's morphological features, their outward appearances, to classify her shell and insect collections respectively. Because Linnaean taxonomy is based on morphology, specifically the external features of biological entities, it is an artificial system and does not take into account an organism's physiology, function, or genealogy in terms of the phylogenetic relationships between species. It is a tool with which to name species, to differentiate between them, and to organize that information; it does not pretend to provide more than a convenient system of classification nor are there embedded within it theories of causation or evolution. John Lightfoot may have been instrumental in helping the duchess learn the new Linnaean system as it applied to shells, for Mary Delany mentions that in January 1771 'the little Philosopher, Mr. Lightfoot came to town [...] and the science of shells went on prosperously'.²¹ Her use of the word 'science' highlights the fact that Lightfoot and the duchess were working to master Linnaean taxonomy as it applied to shells. Both Delany and the duchess were already expert at using Linnaean names and characteristics to classify plants, for in 1735 Linnaeus had published the first of many editions of *Systema Naturae*, which covered the vegetable, mineral, and animal kingdoms, with the exception of mollusks. At Bulstrode, for instance, Mary Delany wrote a manuscript flora 'after the sexual system of Linnaeus', meaning the Linnaean botanical taxonomy built on counting the number of pistils and stamens, the generative parts of a flower, as a way of determining its genus and species. Also, Georg Ehret, the great botanical artist who knew Linnaeus and drew the illustrative tables for the *Systema Naturae*, lived at Bulstrode in the late 1760s, drawing hundreds of plant illustrations there. Johann Christian Fabricius (1745–1808), student of Linnaeus and an author of *Systema entomologiae* (1775) and *Species insectorum* (1781), admired her insect collection and was impressed with her visual acuity and ability to distinguish between these tiny creatures.²²

21 Mary Delany to the Right Hon. Viscountess Andover, 21 January 1771, in Delany, *Autobiography and Correspondence* 4: 326.

22 See Fabricius Johann Christian, *Briefe aus London vermischten Inhalts* (Dessau und Leipzig, Buchhandlung der Gelehrten: 1784).

There can be no doubt that the duchess's insect and shell collections were not mere accumulation as they were organized to display Linnaean systematics. Though some historians depict her as reliant on Lightfoot and Solander to do the work of identification, this is a misrepresentation. The duchess herself did much of the work of identifying and arranging her specimens, calling upon Lightfoot and Solander for assistance. When it came to classifying new molluscan species, this was something that was reserved for Solander to do, as he was an expert taxonomist, and when he died in 1782, Lightfoot took up this task with trepidation. Solander had worked on and off for four years classifying the hundreds of unnamed and unclassified species, naming the non-descript shells with Linnaean names. This dependence on Solander to do the taxonomic work of naming new species was something she shared with Sir Joseph Banks, another very talented and wealthy aristocratic amateur naturalist. Though Banks is regularly referred to as a botanist by historians, a term that implies he was a scientist, he possessed the same level of skill as an identifier of his specimen's genus and species as the duchess, and he relied on Solander and other taxonomists and professional scientists to name the unknown species in his collections. Her male peers who possessed abilities similar to hers as amateur naturalists are referred to by historians as zoologists, botanists, or entomologists, while she has been denied these appellations, earning that of a collector rather than a naturalist.

Despite Pearce's and Baudrillard's persuasive arguments about seriality as key to distinguishing the accumulation from 'proper' collecting, I think that connoisseurial collections receive short shrift in this formulation, dismissed as mere accumulation because they supposedly lack an intellectual rationale that structures their acquisition and arrangement. Is this a fair assessment? The differences between a connoisseur's and a naturalist's natural history collection lie not in the object collected or the manner of acquisition, but in the conceptual work behind the collecting and displaying practices. Shells in a connoisseur's cabinet are selected for their pleasing aesthetic qualities, their immense rarity, and their exotic strangeness. They are arranged to arouse wonder and fascination, either through surprising juxtaposition with other natural or artificial objects displaying elegant intricacy, as Katie Whitaker and Dian Kriz have argued in their studies of cabinets of curiosity, or through artful arrangements of disparate objects that created a pleasing decorative whole, as Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz contend.²³ Shells in a naturalist's cabinet, on the other hand,

23 Kriz K.D., *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (London – New Haven, CT: 2008), Chapter One: "Curiosities, Commodities, and

though they may display some of the same aesthetic qualities of shells as those of connoisseurs, are arranged following an agreed-upon conceptual system, which in the case of the duchess's shell collection was Linnaean systematics. A connoisseur's shell collection with its display of beautiful and interesting objects was designed to reveal the collector's taste, judgment, and fashionable engagement with polite natural history. The processes of collection and display for the non-systematic collector is, according to Susan Pearce, about extending the self through its possessions. Although such a dynamic might also be in place for the naturalist, the collection itself would point beyond the individual who built it to a socially agreed-upon system of thought and its engagement with that system, which in the case of Linnaean systematics, was about defining difference within similarity.

If the connoisseur's collection is about the co-mingling of Art and Nature and the play of similarity across differences, and the naturalist's collection is about establishing differences between similar objects, then both connoisseurs and naturalists are using their collections to generate ideas about the natural world. As Stacey Sloboda suggests, what a connoisseur's collection does is generate a 'pleasing intercourse generated by juxtaposing between *'naturalia* and *artificialia* in productive visual relation to one another'.²⁴ When confronted with a porcelain vase and a snail shell, viewers would, of course, recognize the great difference between the products of the forces of nature and of human ingenuity, but then go on to think about similarities between these two objects in terms of color, texture, shape, fragility, durability, and sensual appeal. This is not mere self-aggrandizing accumulation and display, as Baudrillard might say, but a thoughtful visual engagement with larger questions about relationships between cultural and natural objects. The Duchess of Portland's collecting practices of the 1740s and 1750s mirrored the dynamics of disorder and curiosity, as Sloboda says, produced within elite French *collections curieuses*. In her townhouse's and country house's cabinets of curiosity, shells sat side by side with porcelain and minerals were in conversation with snuff boxes. As Montagu wrote in 1742 describing the duchess's 'closet':

Transplanted Bodies in Hans Sloane's Voyage to Jamaica" 8–35; and Dietz B. – Nutz T., "Collections Curieuses": The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris", *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.3 (2005) 44–76.

24 Sloboda S., "Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland's Museum", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.4 (2010) 455–472, 461.

What cunning confusion, and vast variety, and surprising Universality, must the head possess that is but worthy to make an inventory of the things in that closet. So many things there made by Art and Nature, so many stranger still, and very curious, hit off by chance and causality.²⁵

However, by the 1770s, this comingling and artful juxtaposition does not accurately describe the logic of the duchess's natural history collections or the manner in which they were arranged and displayed. She had separated her natural history specimens from the objects of artifice. Her shells were stored at her town residence at Whitehall in cabinets designed especially for shells. Her insects were stored in specifically-built insect cabinets, with cork-lined drawers topped with glass to prevent the deterioration of the specimens due to invasive and destructive mites. Furthermore, by the 1770s, the duchess had turned her collecting energies away, by and large, from porcelain and other decorative objects toward natural history collecting almost exclusively, with the very large exception of the Barberini Vase acquired a few months before her death.

The Duchess of Portland created multiple collections, and it is a mistake to refer to them in the singular, as if there had been one large collection. This mistake is encouraged by the auction catalogue and, in particular, its frontispiece [Fig. 12.2], which gives the impression that all the things she had collected belonged together, sitting in conversation with each other and spread higgledy-piggledy throughout her residences in no particular order. It is more accurate to think of the duchess as possessing several different collections, each with very different rationales, visual appeal, and social significance, as well as dating from different historical moments in her life. Montagu's description of the Duchess's closet as a site of chaotic delight is from the 1740s, an era when mingling *artificialia* with *naturalia* was productive of curiosity, intrigue, and wonder and was a very fashionable way to decorate interiors. The shift in the duchess's collecting patterns is closely tied to the publication in 1758 of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*, in which he laid out the classes, orders, families, genera, and species of the animal kingdom and included in this edition his first attempt to describe and classify molluscan genera and species. This publication had a profound impact on natural history collecting, providing a system by which specimens, shells especially, could be examined according to a list of characteristics and compared with similar specimens. Moving away from the logic that structured cabinets of curiosity, which required 'an eye geared

25 Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 27 January 1742; quoted by Sloboda 463.

toward similarity rather than difference,²⁶ the duchess deployed the counter logic of Linnaean systematics, its foundation built on even more rigorous protocols of viewing, requiring close examination of an object to distinguish it from a similar one. The question remains, however, as to whether seeing differences among similarity requires higher cognitive functioning than seeing similarities among differences, and if these different ways of thinking about the world are gendered social practices? Regardless of the answers to these questions, it is certain that Margaret Cavendish Bentinck could employ both cognitive frameworks to organize her multi-faceted collections of *naturalia* and *artificialia*.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Delany Mary, *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover, 6 vols. (London: 1861–1862).
- Fabricius Johann Christian, *Briefe aus London vermischten Inhalts* (Dessau und Leipzig, Buchhandlung der Gelehrten: 1784).
- Martyn Thomas, *The Universal Conchologist* (London, n. p.: 1784–1789).
- Montagu Elizabeth, *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, 3 vols. (London, Cadell and Davis: 1809–1813).
- Powys Caroline, *The Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys*, ed. E.J. Climensohn (London: 1899).
- Walpole Horace, *The Duchess of Portland's Museum*, ed. W.S. Lewis (New York: 1936).

Secondary Sources

- Allen D.E., *The Naturalist in Britain* (Harmondsworth: 1978).
- Battacharya N., *Slavery, Colonialism, and Connoisseurship: Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literary Transnationalism* (Burlington – Aldershot: 2006).
- Baudrillard J., “The System of Collecting”, trans. R. Cardinal, in Elsner J. – Cardinal R. (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: 1994) 7–24.
- Dietz B. – Nutz T., “‘Collections Curieuses’: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris”, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.3 (2005) 44–76.
- Hanson C.A., *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago, 2009).
- Kaufmann T.D., “From Treasury to Museum: The Collections of the Austrian Habsburgs”, in Elsner J. – Cardinal R. (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: 1994).

26 Sloboda, “Displaying Materials” 461.

- Kriz K.D., *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (London – New Haven: 2008).
- Pascoe J., *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca: 2006).
- Pearce S.M., *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C.: 1992).
- Saisselin R., *Bricolabromania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick: 1984).
- Shteir A.B., *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760–1860* (Baltimore: 1996).
- Sloboda S., "Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland's Museum", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.4 (2010) 455–472.
- Vane-Wright R.I. – Hughes W.H., *The Seymer Legacy* (Tresaith, Cardigan: 2005).

Curiosity, Women, and the Social Orders

Neil Kenny

Like other passions, virtues, and vices – such as avarice¹ – curiosity was often judged in the early modern period less in absolute terms than in relation to social variables, whether explicit or implicit. Of these, perhaps the most prominent four were: rank; occupation; sex; age. Other variables that fed into judgments about curiosity included a person's state (in the sense of clerical–religious–lay or unmarried–married–widowed), location (urban or provincial), their being 'learned' or 'unlearned', and so on.

Beyond the question of curiosity, scholarship on the general relation between such variables in the period has long emphasized that, to varying extents, they cut across each other.² While occupation and sex were plotted onto each other most closely of all, occupation and rank were also closely entwined. On the other hand, there was obviously more latitude in the relation between sex on the one hand and rank or age on the other.

The interconnectedness, strong or weak, of such social variables was expressed by terms that cut across some of them. One's 'vocation' was an amalgam of rank, occupation, sex, and even of the right course of action in a given situation, according to the Calvinist moral theologian Jean de L'Espine: in a work published in 1587, he understood 'curiosité' as being a failure to follow one's vocation.³ A person's 'quality' could be a combination of rank and state (in one of the senses just listed). Or rank and occupation could be informally bundled together in what Keith Wrightson has called the language of 'sorts' – 'the richer sort', 'the middle sort', and so on.⁴

1 See Patterson J., *Representing Avarice in Late Renaissance France* (Oxford: 2015) chaps 1, 4.

2 E.g. Bush M.L. (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London – New York: 1992), including the essay by Peter Burke, "The Language of Orders in Early Modern Europe" 1–12; Hayden J.M., "States, Estates and Orders: The *qualité* of Female Clergy in Early Modern France", *French History* 8.1 (1994) 51–76; Lougee C.C., *Le Paradis des femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: 1976) chaps 3–4.

3 See Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004) 120–123.

4 Wrightson K., "Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England", in Corfield P.J. (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford: 1991) 30–52.

Starting out from the fact that the more curiosity was female and/or feminized in the early modern period, the more it was likely to be judged reprehensible,⁵ I will take soundings to see what happens to this picture when it includes other social variables too. The soundings are taken mainly from mid-seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century northern Europe (before the more recognisably modern terminology of 'class' became dominant), mainly from France, but occasionally from the Germanic territories and England. My examples are too limited to produce firm conclusions, but might at least point to the question's complexity. By 'curiosity' I mean the recognisable family of terms (*curieux*, *Kuriosität*, and so on) which prominently designated in this period not just a passion, virtue, or vice but also certain kinds of objects ('curiosities'), as well as the relation *between* those objects and the 'curious' desire for them. This approach to women and curiosity, which is obviously not the only possible one, is *not* therefore aimed primarily at investigating the question, that has been so revealingly studied in recent decades,⁶ of the extent of women's participation in early modern learning or science. The approach I adopt is much more limited in scope but might at least begin to suggest some ways in which the profound gendering of this key early modern category of knowledge interacted at a microtextual level with other social variables.

As I have tried to show elsewhere, the notion that the legitimacy of curiosity needs to be judged according to decorum – that is, by the appropriateness of curiosity to a particular person in a particular situation – was spelled out in detail in some of the many German university dissertations that were devoted to the theme. Some of their authors emphasized this relativizing principle of decorum by presenting *curiositas* as synonymous with the Greek terms *polypragmosyne* and *periergia*, meaning roughly 'desire to do or discover things that go beyond one's allotted role in life'.⁷ A related pejorative understanding of curiosity that figured in such dissertations and in other treatises associated the passion with the vice of *voluptas*.⁸ These two negative understandings of

5 See Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity*, chap. 5. For scattered remarks on curiosity and social stratification (not relating to women for the most part), see 170–71, 173–74, 179–181, 184, 193, 199, 200–202, 207–208, 227, 233–234, 241, 249, 251, 252, 269–273, 277–278, 287.

6 E.g. Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes*; Nativel C. (ed.), *Femmes savantes, savoirs de femmes: du crépuscule de la Renaissance à l'aube des Lumières: actes du colloque de Chantilly (22–24 septembre 1995)* (Geneva: 1999); Timmermans L., *L'Accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: 1993); Schiebinger L., "Gender in Early Modern Science", in Kelley D.R. (ed.), *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Rochester, NY: 1997) 319–334.

7 See Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 26, 37, 48, 53–53, 57–58, 62, 64–65, 67, 70, 83, 84–85.

8 See Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 45, 62, 93.

curiosity were certainly applied to a wide range of people of different ranks and sexes, including for example male dilettantes whose pleasure-seeking makes them flit superficially across a wide range of disciplines instead of focusing on one (to cite one German swipe at the French courtly culture of *honnêteté*).⁹ But the quintessential, or perhaps the intensively typical, illustration provided was often female: Queen Christina of Sweden in the text just mentioned;¹⁰ elsewhere, St Paul's lascivious young widows wandering around houses and garrulously saying inappropriate things (1 Timothy 5.13).¹¹ Or sometimes this intense typicality was attributed to the lower social orders: according to one Lutheran leader, the curious, voluptuous love of novelty is found in all social orders but especially in the lower ones.¹²

Good curiosity, on the other hand, was not only much more likely to be male or masculine, but also somewhat more likely to be associated with an aristocratic and/or a courtly or urban milieu than with lower social orders. The association could take the form of attributing curiosity more to those who funded research than to those who undertook it: the curiosity of naturalists and others was sometimes represented as deriving ultimately from their patrons:

Likewise, this curiosity of ours shows itself to be excellent, since it is not cultivated by superficial and feeble men, by obdurate and rustic wits, by the low and squalid dregs of humanity. It requires fiery spirit and acute intelligence, fit for such subtleties. So, those people with the greatest power in the world have for the most part delighted in this curiosity of ours.¹³

9 [Brunnemann Johann (*præses*)] – Henel Christian (*respondens*), *Dissertationum juridicarum de πολυπραγμοσυνη*, germ: *Einmischung in mancherley Haendel, et de partu ancillæ furtivæ* [...] *editio tertia*, Law Faculty, University of Frankfurt-Oder, held [and first printed] 1670 (Frankfurt-Oder: 1691) 21.

10 [Brunnemann] – Henel, *Dissertationum juridicarum* 20.

11 Westphal J., *De vitanda curiositate oratio* [...] in *consessu ministrorum ecclesiae recitata* (Hamburg, Joachim Löwe: 1573) sigs. [A6^v]-[A7^r]. For other writers citing this *locus*, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 397, n. 36.

12 Westphal Joachim Christian (*præses*) – Pipping Heinrich (*respondens*), *De curioso novitatis studio*, Philosophy Faculty, Univ. of Leipzig, held [and first printed] in 1687, in Pipping H., *Exercitationes academicæ juveniles* (Leipzig, heirs of Johann Gross: 1708) chap. 2, para. XIII.

13 'Caeterum haec Curiositatis nostrae excellentia vel exinde quoque patescit, quandoquidem non leves & tenuiores homines, non saxea & rustica ingenia, non abjectae & sordidae hominum quisquillae eam colunt. Igneus hic requiritur spiritus, sagaxque ingenium, huiusmodi subtilitatum capax. Unde contigit, ut qui summam in Mundo potestatem

The author of this inaugural lecture at the Danzig *Gymnasium academicum* then goes on to sketch a history of princely curiosity that takes in Alexander the Great and others before culminating in Charles II, patron of the Royal Society. Not going quite so far, a more famous *Gymnasium* professor, the Jesuit Kaspar Schott, informed the dedicatee of his *Technica curiosa* (1664), the Elector of Mainz, that the 'rare, ingenious, and curious things' it contained were 'worthy of a Prince, a great Prince' ('Quae cum sint rara ingeniosa, curiosa, Principe digna, & Principe Maximo').¹⁴ Or again, the theological *Octo quaestiones* allegedly put to the celebrated Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius by Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I were posthumously reissued by his order in 1621 as *Curiositas regia*, 'A Ruler's Curiosity'.¹⁵

By contrast, when specifically attributed to the lowest social orders, curiosity of any kind was almost invariably condemned.¹⁶ To take an English example of curiosity directed not at the natural world but at human behaviour: in George Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity: A True Tragedy of Three Acts* (London, John Gray: 1737) a young man ends up being killed by his poverty-stricken parents because, upon returning from making his fortune in the Indies, he cannot resist the temptation to disguise himself as a wealthy visiting stranger so he can view their surprise when he reveals his identity and ends their financial woes, the problem being that in their desperation they kill him to rob him of his wealth before he has time to reveal he is their son. The implication is that curiosity has no place in a social context of hand-to-mouth survival, in which it is a grotesquely inappropriate, dangerous luxury.

Curiosity was sometimes represented as particularly ill-befitting not only the poor but also provincials – even the provincial nobility, in contrast to Paris-based *connoisseurs*, in the case of a one-act 1702 play by le sieur Petit, *Les Curieux de province*. It satirizes the naïve enthusiasm that visiting provincial nobles express for the capital's fashionable curiosities ('curiosités à la mode'), including a second-rate opera, which fails on the other hand to fool Damis, the visitors' sophisticated host, who knows them because his country estate is near their home but who mainly resides in Paris himself. It is made clear that 'either

habuerunt, Curiositatem quoque nostram ut plurimum in deliciis habuerunt', Seger G., *Oratio inauguralis, de curiositate physica*, Medical Faculty, Gymnasium Academicum, Danzig, held 1675 (Danzig David-Fridericus Rhetius: 1676), section XIII.

14 Schott Kaspar, *Technica curiosa, sive Mirabilia artis* (Würzburg, printed for Johann Andreas Endter and the heirs of Wolfgang Endter the Younger, by Johann Jobst Hertz: 1664), dedication (to the Elector of Mainz).

15 On another aspect of this renaming, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 141–142.

16 For a German example from 1673, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 413–414.

a man or a woman' can be stupidly curious about fashion ('soit homme ou femme'), and indeed the visitors are of both sexes, a Baronne and a Marquis.¹⁷

The representation of bad curiosity as provincial stuck: a century later, another one-act play (by Planard), set in what seems to be a part-noble, part-bourgeois milieu, shows a sophisticated Parisian mother describing in these terms the near-disastrous curiosity of Forlange, a visitor who is staying in her household: 'if he has the fault of his small town, Paris and my advice will be able to correct it in him' ('s'il a le défaut de sa petite ville / Paris et mes conseils sauront l'en corriger').¹⁸ Although this curiosity is mainly of the busybody type, it is shown to coexist in Forlange with naïve bedazzlement at what Forlange emphasizes to be the instant gratification offered, in a 'boutique' and elsewhere, by the capital's commercialized culture of curiosities, in the form of itemized, fragmented sights and artefacts. In this case, provincial curiosity is more heavily gendered: two sensible characters discuss Forlange: 'LISE. [...] So people are right to spread the word everywhere that a more curious man was never seen. GERMAIN, *to himself*: Quite. Indeed, deep down I think that when she forged him, Nature meant to make a woman'.¹⁹ The play thus makes a strong connection between the social variables of sex (or rather gender, in this effeminate man) and geography.

So does a *comédie-vaudeville*, *Les Curieux de Compiègne* by Dancourt (1698), in which attractive nobles, here of the warrior kind, are again defined in opposition to curiosity, but now at the expense of the urban bourgeoisie rather than the minor provincial nobility, and now with Paris's association with a tacky culture of curiosities coming to the fore, instead of its role as taste arbiter. The play shows a group of *curieux* from the Parisian bourgeoisie visiting an army encampment at Compiègne, to the north of the capital. Their curiosity too gets gendered, with the aristocratic Dancourt suggesting, via the innkeeper Guillaume, that the curiosity of the bourgeois women is worse than that of their husbands, because still more indecorous, and also worse than it would be if they were aristocratic women whose rank properly freed them from domestic chores:

17 Petit Le Sieur, *Les Curieux de province, ou L'Oncle dupé* (La Haye, Pierre Husson: 1702) 3–24 at 8.

18 Planard François Antoine Eugène de, *Le Curieux, comédie* (Paris, Delavigne Fils: 1807) 4. On this play, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 364–366.

19 'LISE. [...] On a donc bien raison de répandre en tous lieux / Que l'on ne vit jamais d'homme si curieux. / GERMAIN, *en confidence*. Assurément; aussi je crois au fond de l'âme / Qu'en le formant Nature a cru faire une femme' (Planard, *Le Curieux* 6).

GUILLAUME [...] I can just about forgive men for it, but what are them bourgeois women doin' here?

Me PINUIN. Curiosity is more forgivable in women than in men, and ...

GUILLAUME. What? Are you taking the mick? Curiosity is allowed in some women, but in tradeswomen, alehouse-keepers, proctors' wives? Is it their business to leave their home and go off to the army?

Me PINUIN. It's true you may have a point there.²⁰

So while in the preceding examples (Petit and Planard) rank itself was not a major factor in making provincials *curieux* in a pejorative sense, here it is, and in a way that combines rank with gender. If, in the case of men, the higher their rank then the greater the likelihood that curiosity is positive, that correlation does not seem to have existed strongly for women, despite some association (to which I will return) between good curiosity and high-ranking women in the period. (It is hinted at here by Dancourt.) Indeed, much male attribution of bad curiosity to women focused less on the alleged qualities of busyboddiness and garrulousness that were deemed to characterize women of all ranks than on what the men presented as a bundle of worldly pursuits – a culture of curiosities – that was characteristic especially of women who had leisure and disposable finance. For many clerics and others, what made this, if anything, even worse than less wealthy kinds of female curiosity was the sense of superiority that it engendered and the ostentation that money made possible: in short, *vanité*. Here is a 1739 prospectus, *La Curiosité fructueuse*, that attempted to raise funds for experimental demonstrations:

Yet it has to be agreed that some women rise above their sex and become distinguished by applying themselves to the liberal arts, such as literature, poetry, music, and painting, in all of which several women have even been seen to excel, indeed so much that, since these arts seem to have been designed for sensual pleasure, polite manners, and intellectual cultivation, it might be assumed that the glory acquired by the illustrious

20 'GUILLAUME [...] pour les hommes encore passe, n'an leur pardonne: mais ces Bourgeoises que venont-elles faire ici?

Me PINUIN. La curiosité est plus pardonnable aux femmes qu'aux hommes, et ...

GUILLAUME. Hé fy morgué, c'est se mocquer, la curiosité est permise à de certaines femmes: mais à des Marchandes, à des Cabaretieres, à des Procureuses: est-ce que c'est leur besogne de quitter leur ménage, et de s'en venir à l'armée?

Me PINUIN. Il y a quelque chose à dire à cela, vous avez raison.

Dancourt Florent Carton, *Les Curieux de Compiègne*, in Dancourt, *Les Œuvres. Troisième édition*, 9 vols (Rouen – Paris, Veuve de Pierre Ribou: 1729) vol. 4, [259]–314 at 273–274.

ladies who have studied them was first the object and then the fruit of their desire for knowledge. But on closer inspection it turns out that the prime factor was education, and that vanity alone was responsible for the rest. As for lower-order women, if curiosity causes them to read, usually it's stories, fables, poetry, and novels; and if they try to inform themselves, it's only about what's going on at the neighbours' or, at most, about what's new in the world of fashion. There's no salt flavouring in all that and so no fruit to harvest; so that's what makes their curiosity the more reprehensible and dangerous for being more bland.

Men's is much more noble and elevated.²¹

The anonymous author carefully distinguishes between the pursuits of wealthy, probably mainly aristocratic and upper-bourgeois women on the one hand, and those of literate but less wealthy women on the other. Both amount to equally dangerous curiosity, but the first has the added factor of 'vanité'. By then attaching the epithet 'noble' to male curiosity, the prospectus makes sex trump rank: if only what these high-ranking women spend on their fruitless curiosity could be redirected at the fruitful kind of curiosity practised by the financially needy, implicitly lower-rank author . . .

A similar suggestion was made by Fénelon, who was Archbishop of Cambrai from 1695. In the following passage he limits the scope of bad female curiosity to learned women. He also widens the scope of female vanity to include all women, but specifies that the kind of vanity found in curious women is the worst:

21 'On doit pourtant demeurer d'accord qu'il y en a quelques unes qui s'élevans au dessus de leur sexe, se distinguent par leur application aux Arts Libéraux, tels que sont les Belles Lettres, la Poésie, la Musique & la Peinture, dans tous lesquels on en a même vu plusieurs qui ont excellé, de sorte que ces Arts ne paroissans être faits que pour le plaisir des sens, la politesse des mœurs & la nourriture de l'esprit, on pourroit penser à l'égard des Dames illustres qui en ont fait leur étude, que la gloire qu'elles y ont aquis, a donc été l'objet & ensuite le fruit du désir qu'elles ont eû de savoir; mais si l'on veut examiner les choses de plus près, on trouvera que l'éducation y a eu la première part, & que la vanité seule a achevé le reste. Quant aux femmes d'un ordre inférieur, si la Curiosité les porte à la lecture, c'est ordinairement celle des Contes, des Fables, des Poésies & des Romans; & si elles cherchent à s'instruire, c'est seulement de ce qui se passe chez leurs voisins, ou tout au plus de la nouveauté des modes & des ajustemens. Or il n'y a dans tout cela nul sel, & par conséquent nul fruit à recueillir: voila donc ce qui rend leur Curiosité d'autant plus blamable & d'autant plus dangereuse qu'elle est plus insipide. / Celle des homes est bien plus noble & bien plus relevée', Anon., *La Curiosité fructueuse* (Paris, Bauche Père et Christophe David: 1739) 10–11. On this work, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 203–206, 394.

Other, coarser kinds of vanity can be corrected more easily, since they can be seen with the eyes and mutually reprimanded, and since they reveal a frivolous temperament. But a curious woman, who takes pride in knowing a great deal, flatters herself that she is superior genius within her sex, and thanks herself for disdaining the entertainments and vanity of other women.²²

Vanity is more insidious in the case of the curious woman because less immediately visible and more laced with pride. This evocation of the patristic notion of *vana curiositas* seems to envisage an aristocratic woman: Fénelon is addressing advice to an unnamed 'dame de qualité' concerning her daughter's education.

The topos about the vanity specific to certain kinds of curious women also appears in the treatise on education written by a friend of Fénelon's, another cleric who also tutored children from great noble families, the abbé Fleury:

It is true that they do not need most of the knowledge that is counted nowadays as study; neither the Latin, the Greek, the rhetoric, nor the philosophy that is taught in colleges are of any use to them. And if some, more curious than the rest, have sought to learn them, most have derived from that only vanity, which has made them odious to other women and disdained by men.²³

22 'D'autres vanités plus grossières se corrigent plus facilement, parce qu'on les aperçoit, qu'on se les reproche, et qu'elles marquent un caractère frivole. Mais une femme curieuse, et qui se pique de savoir beaucoup, se flatte d'être un génie supérieur dans son sexe, elle se sait bon gré de mépriser les amusements et les vanités des autres femmes', *Avis de Monsieur de Fénelon, archevêque de Cambrai, à une dame de qualité, sur l'éducation de Mademoiselle sa fille*, in Fénelon (François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon), *Œuvres*, ed. J. Le Brun, 2 vols (Paris: 1983–1997) vol. 2, [1125]–1134 at 1130. See also Fénelon's "Discours sur les principaux devoirs et les avantages de la vie religieuse", in *Œuvres*, ed. J. Le Brun, vol. 1, 894–919 at 918: 'Mais fuyez comme un poison toutes les curiosités, tous les amusements d'esprit, car les femmes n'ont pas moins de penchant à être vaines par leur esprit que dans leur corps. Souvent les lectures qu'elles font avec tant d'empressement se tournent en parures vaines et en ajustements immodestes de leur esprit; souvent elles lisent par vanité, comme elles se coiffent. Il faut faire de l'esprit comme du corps; tout superflu doit être retranché; [...]. Ô quel amusement pernicieux dans ce qu'on appelle lectures les plus solides! On veut tout savoir, juger de tout, parler de tout, se faire valoir sur tout; rien ne ramène tant le monde vain et faux dans les solitudes que cette vaine curiosité des livres'.

23 'Il est vray qu'elles n'ont pas besoin de la plûpart des conoissances, que l'on comprend aujourd'huy sous le nom d'études, ny le latin, ny le grec, ny la r[h]étorique, ou la philosophie des coléges ne sont point à leur usage; & si quelques-unes, plus curieuses que

In this case the attack on women who have access to college-like learning probably targets a wider range of relatively wealthy women than just aristocrats. Although the treatise originated in a commission relating to an aristocratic boy, this eventual printed version extends not only to girls but also to other social orders above the peasantry. The curious girls and young women accused of vanity here seem to be the participants in, and identifiers with, the great wave of women-led salon culture that fanned out from the aristocracy into the upper bourgeoisie in seventeenth-century France.

However, this attack is more nuanced than that of the 1739 prospectus quoted earlier. Fleury means the phrase 'la plûpart' to be taken seriously, as becomes clear when the topos re-emerges at the very end of this chapter on female education:

They can do without the remaining subjects – Latin and the other languages, history, mathematics, poetry, and all the other curiosities. They are not destined for roles that make the study of these necessary or useful, and such study would make many women vain. Nonetheless, their leisure hours would be better spent on it than on reading novels, playing, or talking about their skirts and ribbons.²⁴

Within Fleury's terminology, 'curious studies' ('études curieuses') are one of four kinds of study, the other three being 'necessary', 'useful', and 'useless' studies. The disciplines listed here are a combination of 'useful' and 'curious studies'. This passage establishes a similar distinction to the one given in the 1739 prospectus between higher-brow pursuits and lower-brow female pursuits. But unlike that prospectus, Fleury does not map that distinction onto a rank-based one between higher and lower social orders. And whereas the 1739 prospectus defines both kinds as bad curiosity, Fleury only defines some

les autres, ont voulu les apprendre, la plûpart n'en ont tiré que de la vanité, qui les a rendues odieuses aux autres femmes, & méprisables aux hommes', Fleury Claude, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* (Paris, Pierre Aubouin, Pierre Emery, et Charles Clousier: 1686) 264–265. The present discussion expands upon, and develops in a different direction (that of social stratification), the remarks on Fleury and Fénelon in Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 212–216, 391–393. On these thinkers' views about social reform, see Cuche F., *Une pensée sociale catholique: Fleury, La Bruyère et Fénelon* (Paris: 1991).

- 24 'Elles se peuvent passer de tout le reste des études: du latin, & des autres langues, de l'histoire, des mathématiques, de la poésie, & de toutes les autres curiosités. Elles ne sont point destinées aux emplois qui rendent ces études nécessaires ou utiles, & plusieurs en tireroient de la vanité. Il vaudroit mieux toutefois qu'elles y employassent les heures de leur loisir, qu'à lire des romans, à joüer, ou parler de leurs juppes, & de leurs rubans' (Fleury, *Traité* 270).

of the higher-brow kind as curiosity, although the lower-brow kind (reading romances, talking fashion) *was* often called curiosity by others. Instead, 'useful' and 'curious studies' are morally neutral in themselves,²⁵ but bad for virtually all girls, and for many or even most boys, for reasons of decorum: they will not help them in their role in life. Unusual for a critic of salon culture is Fleury's passing but repeated acknowledgement that not all girls will be made vain by 'curious studies' (*plusieurs en tireroient de la vanité*), and his consequent concession – echoing the traditional 'keeping out of mischief' approach to female education – that 'curious studies' are at least better than more trivial pursuits for the few non-vain women.

Rank and state intersect with gender in Fleury's prescriptions about female education: his pushing girls away from 'curious' and 'useful' studies towards 'necessary' ones is part of his agrarian agenda of social reform, which would see for example the female nobility acquire more systematically a knowledge-base that included elements of 'grammar' (correct writing), arithmetic, economics (estate management), and jurisprudence, to enable women to take a larger role in managing family assets, which is particularly important in France, says Fleury, because its widows inherit.²⁶ On the other hand, 'useful studies', such as Latin and history, are not for women of any rank (except for nuns who need some Latin), nor for boys of the middling sort ('de condition médiocre'), but only for boys of the higher social orders ('d'une condition honête'), since they are likely to have a role in public affairs. 'Curious studies' such as poetics, antiquarianism, ancient languages other than Latin, are only good when appropriate to very specialist needs, for example of high-ranking clerics. So 'curious studies' produce vanity not only in most women but also in some of the men who undertake them and are proud to know what others do not.²⁷

Like many of his contemporaries (such as Fénelon), Fleury also wishes women not to be knowledgeable ('savantes') about theology: the religious component of his 'necessary studies' for women is limited to ethics and basic dogma. He does not expand this point in relation to rank, but others did: another reason why female curiosity was sometimes thought particularly pernicious among the high-ranking was that it was more likely to corrupt lower-ranking women. In the case of religion, this was thought by some to have

25 Studies that are bad in themselves – alchemy, divination, and so on – are given a fourth label, 'useless studies'. So 'curiosity' is not the automatically negative label that it usually is for Fénelon.

26 Fleury, *Traité* 269–270.

27 Fleury, *Traité* 89, 92.

happened with Marguerite de Navarre, sister of François 1^{er} and Catholic promoter of Luther-inspired evangelical reform:

But it must be acknowledged that, among so many fine qualities, she had that dangerous fault to which the most spiritual and intelligent ladies are usually most prone, unless they take great care to protect themselves from it – I mean: great curiosity to know the secrets of new doctrines, especially as regards religion. From that comes presumptuousness (from wanting to judge those doctrines) and then error and stubbornness (from adhering to the doctrines).

The Protestants, who easily spotted this weak point, did not fail to take advantage of it by trying to recruit such a great Princess to their cause.²⁸

Her curiosity was all the more damaging because of the influence her rank gave her.

This particular danger posed by high-ranking female curiosity was not confined to religion. In a play performed after the period I mainly consider, *La Curieuse* by Madame de Genlis (full version 1781), the eponymous child-heroine – the aristocratic Pauline – almost causes her brother's death through her prying curiosity, which she is responsible for passing down the social hierarchy to her accomplice Rose, the gardener's daughter. Rose says 'Oh! She's the one who's curious. And she made me the same'. ('Oh! C'est celle-là qui est curieuse; elle me l'a rendue aussi, moi'). As if to emphasize that Rose has a point, the playwright has Pauline regret that she's given the peasant girl these 'bad examples' ('mauvais exemples') and Pauline's mother makes her ashamed at having done so.²⁹

When, on the other hand, the main focus in a play shifted onto the curiosity of a low-ranking woman, then *her* curiosity could be more excusable, even

28 'Mais il faut avoüer que parmi tant de belles qualitez, elle eût ce dangereux défaut, auquel les Dames les plus spirituelles sont ordinairement le plus sujettes, si elles ne prennent grand soin de s'en garantir, je veux dire, une grande curiosité pour sçavoir les secrets des nouvelles Doctrines, sur tout en matiere de Religion, d'où vient insensiblement la présomption, pour en vouloir juger, & ensuite l'erreur & l'opiniastreté, pour s'y attacher. / Les Protestans, qui découvrirent aisément ce foible, ne manquerent pas de s'en prévaloir, pour tascher d'engager une si grande Princesse dans leur parti', Maimbourg Louis, *Histoire du calvinisme* (Paris, Sebastien Mabre Cramoisy: 1682) 16.

29 [Genlis Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin], *La Curieuse* [2-act version 1779; 5-act version 1781], in *Théâtre de société*, 2 vols. (Dublin, G. Wilson, R. Moncrieffe, P. Byrne, & R. Burton: 1783) 249, 250. I quote from the five-act version. On this play, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 402–405.

though it was of the busybody kind widely condemned in the early modern period and by Plutarch (in his influential treatise on *polypragmosyne*, known in translation as *De la curiosité*). As I have tried to show elsewhere, this happened in French plays (and one comic opera) stretching from the figure of the nurse in Pierre Corneille's *Mélite* (first published 1633) right up to the *femme de chambre* in an obscure comedy *Les Heureux Mensonges, ou La Curiosité excusable* by Mademoiselle Carreau (1813).³⁰ What these low-ranking *curieuses* have in common is that their prying and indiscretion, while reprehensible in itself, results in knowledge-circulation that makes the happy ending possible. Their reputation seems to rely less on rigorous moral purity than does that of the higher-ranking female protagonists, so their morality can more easily be sacrificed for the general good. Their lot can be contrasted with the devastating reputation-loss of the high-ranking heroines of Joan de Luce's 1822 novel *Curiosity* and of Eliza Haywood's 1724 novella *The Masqueraders; or Fatal Curiosity*, which ends with these words: 'Philecta is sufficiently convinc'd how infinitely to blame she was, in indulging a Curiosity which proved so fatal to her Virtue, her Reputation, and her Peace of Mind; and which, 'tis highly probable, will in a short time be found so to her Life'.³¹ However, if curiosity of various kinds was often deemed particularly reprehensible and dangerous among high-born women, on the other hand did not the above-mentioned *mondain* current defend and promote female learning – and even sometimes curiosity – especially in the higher social orders, both within upper-aristocracy salons and among their imitators in the lower nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie?³² Let me investigate two influential texts in this current, separated by a century.

L'Honneste Femme (1632) by the sometime Franciscan Jacques Du Bosc, a manual for the *mondaine*, salon-oriented woman, is exactly the kind of work against which Fleury will later argue. Du Bosc urges 'dames' – both aristocrats and those within the urban bourgeoisie who had servants and access to salon-like polite conversation – to acquire a considerable amount of knowledge through reading and conversation (systematic education is not mentioned), for the sake not of any professional purposes but of broadening their mind and of enabling them to contribute actively to conversation. The household management praised by Fleury is here denigrated – as consisting in giving orders to servants and in combing children's hair – in favour of music, history,

30 Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 418–423.

31 [Haywood Eliza], *The Masqueraders; or Fatal Curiosity: being the Secret History of a Late Amour* (London, J. Roberts: 1724) 47.

32 See Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes*; Maclean I., *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: 1977).

philosophy.³³ But in the chapter in question, 'On learned ladies', Du Bosc does not in fact mainly present himself as defending female *curiosity*.³⁴ Why not? He equates female curiosity almost entirely (in another chapter) with pointless pursuits such as malicious gossip, away from which he feels women need to be directed.³⁵ One explanation for his reluctance to call women's good desire for good knowledge 'curiosity' is that his treatise was composed at a time when, irrespective of sex, the existence of a good kind of curiosity was generally not as self-evident as it would be 50 years later. That explanation is partly true, but the following passage nuances it:

I do not condemn that divine curiosity of philosophers and of fine minds, which has revealed to us the secrets of nature and has given us the means to regulate the soul's passions. I condemn only that curiosity which leads us to know things that are useless or beset by vice.³⁶

The fact that Du Bosc *does*, at this single point, label as 'curiosity' what seems to be gendered here as a male pursuit of good knowledge suggests that he feels that the common association of female curiosity with vice is so strong that defending female learning as curiosity would simply undermine his defence of female learning in the eyes of some readers. By 1673, when Poulain de la Barre published his bold feminist treatise, that situation seems to have changed a little.³⁷ But it is still striking that the period's new badges of female cultural agency – *dame savante*, *femme forte*, *précieuse* – did not include *curieuse* or *curiosae*, whereas *curieux* and *curiosi* became badges of honour for men in many contexts.

A century later, however, curiosity could be attributed more squarely to a noblewoman interested (in this case) in naturalist knowledge, and in a way that seems to have been directed at literate women among the bourgeoisie too. But

33 Du Bosc Jacques, *L'Honneste Femme* (Lyon, Jean Gregoire: 1665) 266.

34 Du Bosc, "Des dames scavantes" in *L'Honneste Femme* 258–278. There is one minor exception (276).

35 Du Bosc, *L'Honneste Femme* 132–137.

36 'Je ne blâme pas cette divine curiosité des Philosophes, & des bons esprit[s] qui nous a découvert les secrets de la nature, & qui nous a donné les moyens de regler les passions de l'ame. Je condamne seulement cette curiosité, qui nous porte à sçavoir ce qui est inutile ou vitieux, [...]' (Du Bosc, *L'Honneste Femme* 133).

37 In contrast with Du Bosc, Poulain de la Barre associates female (as well as male) curiosity with a quest for deep knowledge, rather than with the gossip and other practices regularly conceived by others as a more superficial culture of curiosities. Poulain de la Barre François, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (Paris: 1984) 103–104.

even this female curiosity is represented as more circumscribed than its male noble equivalent. The noblewoman, 'Madame la Comtesse de Jonval', is one of the small group of interlocutors in *Le Spectacle de la nature* (1732–1742) by the abbé Pluche. This compendium of naturalist knowledge, directed at least in part at children, was one of the most widely read works in eighteenth-century France. The Countess's husband, assisted by a cleric ('Le Prieur'), is teaching a noble boy, 'Monsieur le Chevalier du Breuil', about nature during the college holidays. The Countess soon joins in the conversations. The whole enterprise is saturated in a positive language of curiosity.³⁸ The Countess is represented not just as curious herself but, even more, as possessing and transmitting considerable knowledge that will satisfy a boy's curiosity about some aspects of nature. She determines some of the topics and chairs the discussion while her husband is away travelling. This epistemological authority flows partly from the authority she possesses by virtue of her rank: she orders a servant to bring them her box of carefully preserved butterfly specimens.³⁹ However, she herself points out, perhaps in an elusively ironic tone, the decorum-based limitations on her role and her knowledge (derived from observation and collecting rather than from books⁴⁰), as does the original version of the author's Preface: 'She is a lady of sound character, who likes to be occupied, but who also knows how to reconcile the extreme passion that she has to adorn her mind through useful knowledge with, on the other hand, what she owes to worldly decorum and to her state'.⁴¹ She has a liminal role within the knowledge economy, as is evident when they discuss a bobbin-winder, of which Le Prieur recalls: 'It was purely to satisfy the curiosity of Madame the Countess herself, and to know exactly how long a silkworm's thread could be, that I had a little bobbin-winder made, [...]'.⁴² So, when curiosity is thus explicitly attributed to her, she is put

38 On other aspects of this work's treatment of curiosity, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 216–219. The Countess figures only in volume 1, and the discussions are eventually replaced by letters.

39 [Pluche Noël Antoine], *Le Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1 (La Haye, Jean Neaulme: 1743) 48, 59.

40 Pluche, *Le Spectacle de la nature* vol. 1, 66.

41 'C'est une Dame d'un caractere solide, & qui s'occupe volontiers, mais qui sait en même tems concilier l'extrême passion qu'elle a de s'orner l'esprit par des connoissances utiles, avec ce qu'elle doit aux bienséances du monde & à son état', Pluche, *Le Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1 (Paris, Veuve Estienne, et Jean Desaint: 1732) xiii. This passage was excised from the Preface in the later, 1743 edition to which I otherwise refer.

42 'C'est uniquement pour contenter la curiosité de Madame la Comtesse elle-même, & pour savoir au juste quelle pouvoit être la longueur du fil d'un Ver à soye, que j'ai fait construire

partly in the same position as the boy, as someone learning from men, and yet also partly in the more active position of someone instigating an experiment.

These two examples suggest the complexity of the relation of high-ranking women to the culture of curiosities. Du Bosc advocates unsystematic but extensive knowledge-acquisition by such women; he thus promotes the kind of epistemological model that would soon often be understood in the period as the collecting of curiosities (material or discursive), except that he cautiously refrains from that terminology. Pluche, on the other hand, operates within a modified culture of curiosities in which the model of collecting 'particulars' ('particularités') is now limited to 'natural curiosities' ('curiosités naturelles') and is more compatible with systematic knowledge, but is more restricted by decorum for the noblewoman on her Picardy estate than for Du Bosc's 'honneste femme'. Pluche's Countess claims 'garden, vegetables, fruit, pets' ('jardin, légumes, fruit, animaux domestiques') as her special subjects. Even Fleury would probably have approved of this knowledge in her, although he would not have called it 'curiosity'.

If we turn to the Germanic territories, can we find more emphatic promotion of curiosity specifically among women of the nobility and bourgeoisie? Yes, but that curiosity was not necessarily learning, and was sometimes even distinguished from it. Many German books and periodicals marketed a wide range of knowledge-fragments as 'curious', using the Germanicized version of the French term to promote a courtly sophistication redolent of France. The author of one such volume, the *Useful, Gallant, and Curious Lexicon for Women* (1715), outlined in a preface the three categories of women for whom he was catering. The 'learned' ('gelehrte') kind is *not* associated by him with curiosity. Nor, more predictably, is the 'domestic and conscientious' kind ('haushältige und sorgfältige'). Rather, curiosity is the province of the 'curious and gallant' kind ('curiöse und galante'), to whom is directed information about foreign fashion, oils and silks, games, fancy turns of phrase, or goddesses who might crop up in a poem at a wedding.⁴³ The culture of curiosities seems to have been at its most unhesitant in appealing specifically to noble and bourgeois women when the knowledge-fragments on offer related to material or discursive adornments that were learning-lite.

There were however in France and the Germanic territories other publications within the culture of curiosities that did appeal to what they presented

un petit dévidoir, [...]'], Pluche, *Le Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1 (La Haye, Jean Neaulme: 1743) 85.

43 [Corvinus Gottlieb Siegmund], *Nutzbares, galantes und curiöses Frauenzimmer-Lexicon* (Leipzig, Johann Friedrich Gleditsch und Sohn: 1715) sigs.): (3^r–[]): (6^r)).

as the good curiosity of noble and bourgeois women for all kinds of knowledge-fragments, not just ones that were to serve as worldly adornments. These tended to be publications directed not only at these women, but at men too, and sometimes even at women and men of any rank. One book of secrets – detailing remedies, tricks, cosmetics, crafts, chemical techniques, and more – was presented as a *Cabinet of New and Rare Curositities* with the author insisting that ‘no-one of any rank, sex, or age can fail to derive some use from this [...]’.⁴⁴ The postulation of a good curiosity that traversed a wide range of social groups was not confined to books of secrets. In France, the Jesuit René de Ceriziers, one of a small band in the period to have tried to get the notion of good curiosity about religious matters catch on, is explicit about the range of rank, geography, and sex in which he claimed to detect the good curiosity that he aims to satisfy in the work he is prefacing:

Curiosity is so great that you can barely attend a gathering, especially a cleric like me,⁴⁵ as indeed has often happened to me – whether among the grand or the humble, in the city or in the country – without people immediately putting on the table an infinite number of Curious Questions: why this and why that? Even ladies are not exempt from this itch that is so natural to their sex and that makes them have their mind on their tongue more often than their spindle on their fingers.⁴⁶

Ceriziers attributes good curiosity either to greater and lesser members of the noble, courtly milieu that is his own (if one interprets ‘nostre condition’ as referring to his rank) or else to the nobility and also lesser people (if one interprets ‘nostre condition’ as referring to his occupation as a cleric). In either case,

44 ‘es ist niemand, wes Standes, Geschlechts oder Alters er sey, der hierauß nicht seinen Nutz ziehen könnte [...]’, *Schatzkammer rare und neuer Curiositäten, in den aller-wunderbahresten Würckungen der Natur und der Kunst* (Hamburg, Gottfried Schultzen: 1686). First edition 1684.

45 An alternative reading would be ‘especially among people of our rank’.

46 ‘la Curiosité est si grande, qu’a peine pouvez-vous vous trouver en quelque compagnie, particulièrement ceux de nostre condition, comme il m’est arrivé maintefois, soit parmi les grands, soit entre les petits, à la ville et aux champs, qu’incontinent on ne mette sur le tapis une infinité de Questions Curieuses; pourquoy cecy et pourquoy cela? Les Dames mesmes ne sont pas exemptes de cette demangeaison si naturelle à leur sexe, qui leur fait avoir plus souvent le cerveau sur la langue, que le fuseau sur les doigts’. See Ceriziers René de, *La Sainte Curiosité, ou Questions curieuses, sur les principaux articles de la foy, mysteres de la religion et ceremonies de l’Eglise* (Paris, Estienne Danguy: 1643), sig. e[i]r. On other aspects of this work’s treatment of curiosity, see Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity* 144–150.

women are emphatically included, if with an echo of the old, usually pejorative topos about their incorrigibly curious nature.

These limited soundings provisionally suggest that, although curiosity was often shaped predominantly by sex and gender, in some cases sex and gender did not constitute the sole, or even the most, prominent social variable. But even in those cases, with their predominantly rank-based stratification of curiosity, in which, say, bad curiosity was attributed to the bourgeoisie or the provincial nobility, curiosity was usually still visibly gendered, usually at the expense of women. Although good curiosity was sometimes attributed to relatively wealthy women, rank-based judgements on curiosity often seem to have been inflected along gender lines particularly strongly when it came to the upper social orders, whose men were increasingly allowed to be curious; for it was often emphasized that the curiosity of high-ranking women could be even more damaging than that of women from lower social orders.

On the other hand, what such bold generalizations omit are the signs in many texts – from Fleury's fleeting concession that 'curious studies' are alright for some women to Du Bosc's reluctance to call learned salon women 'curious' – that writers of different ideological persuasions had trouble in pinning down definitively the nexus of curiosity, women, and the social orders.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anon., *La Curiosité fructueuse* (Paris, Bauche Père and Christophe David: 1739).
- Ceriziers René de, *La Sainte Curiosité, ou Questions curieuses, sur les principaux articles de la foy, mysteres de la religion et ceremonies de l'Eglise* (Paris, Estienne Danguy: 1643).
- [Corvinus Gottlieb Siegmund], *Nutzbares, galantes und curiöses Frauenzimmer-Lexicon* (Leipzig, Johann Friedrich Gleditsch und Sohn: 1715).
- Dancourt Florent Carton, *Les Curieux de Compiègne*, in Dancourt, *Les Œuvres. Troisième édition*, 9 vols (Rouen – Paris, Veuve de Pierre Ribou: 1729) vol. 4, [259]–314.
- Du Bosc Jacques, *L'Honneste Femme* (Lyon, Jean Gregoire: 1665).
- Fénelon François de Salignac de La Mothe-, *Avis de Monsieur de Fénelon, archevêque de Cambrai, à une dame de qualité, sur l'éducation de Mademoiselle sa fille*, in Fénelon, *Œuvres*, ed. J. Le Brun, 2 vols (Paris: 1983–97) vol. 2, [1125]–1134.
- Fleury Claude, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* (Paris, Pierre Aubouin, Pierre Emery, et Charles Clousier: 1686).
- Petit Le Sieur, *Les Curieux de province, ou L'Oncle dupé* (La Haye, Pierre Husson: 1702).
- Planard François Antoine Eugene de, *Le Curieux, comédie* (Paris, Delavigne Fils: 1807).

[Pluche Noel-Antoine], *Le Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1 (Paris, Veuve Estienne, et Jean Desaint: 1732).

———, *Le Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1 (La Haye, Jean Neaulme: 1743).

Secondary Sources

Burke P., "The Language of Orders in Early Modern Europe", in M.L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London – New York: 1992) 1–12.

Cuche F., *Une pensée sociale catholique: Fleury, La Bruyère et Fénelon* (Paris: 1991)

Kenny N., *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: 2004).

Lougee C.C., *'Le Paradis des femmes': Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: 1976).

Maclean I., *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: 1977).

Nativel C. (ed.), *Femmes savantes, savoirs de femmes: du crépuscule de la Renaissance à l'aube des Lumières: actes du colloque de Chantilly (22–24 septembre 1995)* (Geneva: 1999).

Patterson J., *Representing Avarice in Late Renaissance France* (Oxford: 2015).

Schiebinger L., "Gender in Early Modern Science", in Kelley D.R. (ed.), *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Rochester, NY: 1997) 319–334.

Timmermans L., *L'Accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: 1993).

Index Nominum

- Adam 12, 13, 14, 28, 29, 30, 38, 136, 148, 154, 176
- Agnew, Thomas 227
- Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich
Cornelius 41, 53, 54, 58
- Albertus Magnus 23, 25
- Alembert, Jean le Rond d' 192, 212–213
- Alexis, Guillaume 49
- Andrewes, Lancelot 35, 38
- Anger, Jane 42, 44, 50–51, 54–56, 58
- Anslay, Brian 41, 59
- Aquinas, Thomas 14
- Aristotle 31–32, 48, 51, 143, 152, 160, 174
- Ascham, Roger 36
- Astell, Mary 18–19, 23, 93, 142, 143, 146, 148, 158
- Augustine 5, 12, 14, 30, 32, 38, 65, 160, 163, 164 n. 16, 174
- Aylmer, John 35–36, 38
- Bachaumont, Louis Petit de 213
- Bacon, Francis 6–7, 8, 14–15, 24, 94 n. 6, 95, 98–99, 101–102, 105, 126, 127, 131, 132, 134, 137
- Bandeville, Mme 198, 199, 205
- Banks, Joseph Sir 227–228
- Baret, Jeanne 200
- Bariatinski, Ivan 212
- Basset, Robert 22 n. 56, 23 n. 57, 24
- Beaudoin, Mlle 199, 209–210
- Bentinck, Margaret Cavendish Holles Harley,
Duchess of Portland xii, 18, 216, 217, 219, 220, 221, 222, 227, 229, 230, 231
- Bentinck, William, 2nd Duke of
Portland 220
- Biheron, Marie-Marguerite 198, 199, 200, 211–213, 215
- Bougainville, Louis-Antoine de 200
- Boyle, Robert 20, 21 n. 52, 142, 153
- Brabender, Johann 36
- Bracacci (chapel in Florence) 36
- Brathwaite, Richard 15, 16, 24
- Breton, Nicholas 42, 44, 59
- Brinsley, John 16, 24
- Browne, Sir Thomas 127, 134–136, 140
- Bruni da Pistoia, Domenico 36
- Brunnemann, Johann 235 nn. 9–10
- Bure, Mme de 199, 204
- Burton, Richard 28, 38
- Buténé, Mlle 199
- Calvin, John 14, 29, 34, 38, 40, 233
- Camus, Jean-Pierre 14, 24
- Casanova, Giacomo 207–209, 214
- Catherine de' Medici 27
- Catherine II (Empress of Russia) 211–212
- Catherine of Austria 27
- Cavendish, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle
vii, ix, 16–17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 90, 93–106, 132, 133, 134, 137, 138, 140, 145, 219 n. 3
- Cavendish, William, Duke of Newcastle
16, 21 n. 53, 103, 144
- Cecil, William 34
- Centlivre, Susanna 123, 139, 140
- Ceriziers, René de 248, 249
- Chapman, George 11, 12, 24
- Chardin, Jean Siméon 201 n. 9
- Charleton, Walter 145, 146, 149, 158
- Chartres, The Duchess of 199, 200
- Chaucer, Geoffrey 61, 69
- Christine de Pizan 31, 41
- Chudleigh, Mary 146
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius 53, 65
- Clairon, Claire-Josèphe 199, 200
- Clapham, David 41
- Clerke, Charles 223
- Commerson, Philibert 200
- Constantin, Jacques 213
- Conway, Anne vii, ix, 17, 22, 141–159
- Cook, James Captain xi, 223
- Copland, William 43, 46, 59
- Corvinus, Gottlieb Siegmund 247 n. 43, 249
- Courtagnon, Marie-Catherine Le Franc de
198–199, 206–207
- Cousin, Jean 12–13
- Cowley, Hannah 223
- Cureau de la Chambre, Marin 160 n. 1, 174
- Cusa, Nicolas of 12

- Damery, Mme 199
 Dancourt, Florent Carton 237–238, 249
 Daubenton, Louis 204 n. 12
 Davies, Sir John 127–130, 134, 140
 Delany, Mary 221, 227, 231
 Denny, Edward 16, 78, 91, 93, 104–105
 Descartes, René x, 7 n. 18, 18, 19, 21, 24,
 143 n. 8, 144 n. 10, 145, 146, 149, 151,
 152, 153, 154, 155, 157, 158, 159, 165 n. 22,
 166 n. 24, 174, 188
 Dezallier d'Argenville, Antoine 197, 198, 204,
 205, 214
 Diderot, Denis x, 192–193, 195, 212–213, 214
 Dinah 1, 10
 Donne, John 43, 151
 Drake, Judith 19, 24
 Du Bosc, Jacques 244–245, 247, 249
 Du Châtelet, Émilie ix, 198, 199, 200
 Dubois-Jourdain, Mme 199, 204–205, 214
 Duplessy, Jeanne-Marie Chazot 199, 200

 Ehret, Georg 227
 Elizabeth I 10, 14, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39
 Elyot, Sir Thomas 41, 42, 46, 48–49, 51–52,
 56, 57
 Eve 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32,
 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 57, 136, 137, 141,
 167–168, 176, 182, 183
 Evelyn, Mary 17

 Fabricius, Johann Christian 227, 231
 Fénelon, François de Salignac de La Mothe-
 8, 19, 24, 162–163, 169, 172, 174, 180, 181,
 182–183, 195, 196, 239–240, 241, 242,
 249, 250
 Ferrein, Antoine 212
 Flecknoe, Richard 99, 100, 105
 Fleury, Claude 240–242, 244, 247, 249, 250
 Fontenelle, Bernard le Bouyer de iv, 4, 19,
 178, 179, 185, 186, 187, 188 n. 37, 189–195
 Furetière, Antoine 109, 110, 160

 Genlis, Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de
 Saint-Aubin de 212–213, 214, 243
 Gérard, Abbé Armand de 179 n. 12, 195
 Glover, Thomas 139, 140
 Goodman, Christopher 33, 38
 Gosson, Stephen 42, 46, 47, 59, 73–74, 75
 Gosynhyll, Edward 42, 47–48, 52–53, 54, 55,
 57, 58, 59
 Grandpré, Madame 199, 210
 Grimm, Friedrich Melchior 212, 213, 214
 Guettard, Jean-Étienne 205
 Gustav III 212

 Hall, Joseph 1, 24
 Harley, Edward, 2nd Earl of Oxford 219
 Harley, Henrietta Cavendish 220
 Haywood, Eliza 244
 Belmont, Francis Mercury van 149, 157
 Henel, Christian 235 n. 9
 Herodotus 114 n. 34
 Herrick, Robert 100
 Hesiod 11–12, 24
 Hobbes, Thomas 96, 97, 98, 105, 106,
 144–145, 149, 155, 157–158, 159
 Holland, Henry 28, 38
 Holland, Philemon 126–128
 Hooke, Robert 94–95, 101, 105, 137
 Howard, Henry 35, 39
 Hudson, Henry 125, 126
 Huet, Pierre-Daniel 114 n. 34
 Hume, David 3, 8, 24
 Humphrey, George 223
 Humphrey, Laurence 35, 39

 James VI & I 37, 85
 Joanna of Austria 27
 Jonson, Ben xi, 78, 85, 91, 100

 Keith, George 153–154, 157
 Knox, John viii, 30–35, 38, 39, 40
 Kyng, John 43

 L'Espine, Jean de 233
 La Bruyère, Jean de 116, 163, 173, 174, 194, 195,
 241, 250
 La Fontaine, Jean de 8, 24, 114
 La Marck, Mme de 199, 200
 La Mothe Le Vayer, François de 109, 110, 113,
 121, 190 n. 41
 Lamia 2, 10, 12, 14
 Leigh, Edward 28
 Lesclache, Louis de 178–181, 187, 195
 Lightfoot, John Reverend 227–228
 Lillo, George 236

- Linnaeus, Carl von 205, 227, 230
 Locke, John 2-3, 19, 24, 148
 Lodge, Thomas 126-127
 Loret, Jean 119-120
 Louis XIV (King of France) 108, 112
 Louis XVI (King of France) 213
 Lulle, Raymond 208
 Lupton, Thomas 22 n. 56, 24
 Luther, Martin 14, 29, 40, 243

 Macbride, David 207
 Machiavelli, Nicolò 31
 Maimbourg, Louis 243 n. 28
 Maitland, Sir Richard 41
 Malboissière, Geneviève de 200, 204
 Malebranche, Nicolas x, 19, 146, 149, 163-170, 172-173, 174
 Maria-Theresa of Austria 108
 Marivaux, Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de x, 192, 195
 Martyn, Thomas 222, 231
 Mary of Austria (Queen of Hungary) 27
 Mary Tudor (Queen of England) 27, 32, 34
 Mary, Queen of Scots viii, 27
 Masham, Damaris 146, 148
 Méliand, Adélaïde de 199, 204-205
 Mercier, Louis-Sébastien 213
 Meugnier, Mlle 199, 210
 Milton, John 13, 24
 Molière 20, 112, 114, 161, 179
 Montagu, Elizabeth 222, 229-230, 231
 Montaigne, Michel de 66 n. 8, 75
 Montesquieu, C. L. de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de x, 178 n. 9
 Morand, Sauveur 211-212, 214
 More, Edward 42, 53, 55
 More, Henry ix, 149, 150, 152, 153, 154-156, 157, 158

 Nashe, Thomas 42, 49-51, 52, 59
 Norris, John 143, 146-150, 158, 159

 Osborne, Dorothy 17

 Pandora 2, 10-14, 28, 87
 Paracelsus 208
 Parr, Elnathan 28
 Pascal, Blaise 175

 Paul (saint) 8, 13, 34, 235
 Paul's St (cathedral) 35
 Pellisson, Paul 119 n. 56
 Pepys, Samuel 17, 24
 Périer, Augustin-Charles 213
 Perrault, Charles 9
 Petit, Le Sieur 236, 237, 249
 Petrarch 115 n. 35
 Planard, François Antoine Eugène de 237-238, 250
 Pluche, Noël-Antoine 246-247, 250
 Plutarch 10, 12, 14, 36, 109, 110 n. 15, 122, 244
 Poulain de la Barre, François x, 19, 170-174, 184-185, 187, 193, 196, 245
 Powys, Caroline 221-222, 231
 Pringle, John 207, 213
 Purchas, Samuel 125, 126 n. 7, 140
 Pyrrye, Charles 42, 53-56, 57

 Rambouillet, Madame de 110
 Régnier, Nicolas 12
 Rémy, Pierre 204, 205, 214
 Richelieu, Armand Jean du Plessis de 112, 119 n. 56
 Ripa, Cesare 6, 24
 Rivet, André 161, 174
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel 12
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques x, 178, 181
 Rowlands, Samuel 9, 25

 Sade, Donatien Alphonse François de 192, 196
 Schott, Kaspar 236
 Schurman, Anna Maria van vii, 161, 174
 Scudéry, Madeleine de ix-x, 17-18, 23, 62 n. 3, 90, 107-122
 Shadwell, Thomas 223
 Shakespeare, William vii-viii, 15, 37, 39, 61, 63, 69, 75, 128
 Sidney, Sir Philip 16, 78, 81, 88, 91
 Sloane, Hans 225, 229 n. 23
 Smith, Thomas 36, 39

 The Superior of La Pitié, Mme 199, 200
 Thiroux d'Arconville, Marie-Geneviève 18, 198, 199, 206, 207, 215
 Thouin, Mademoiselle 199, 200

Urfé, Camus de Pontcarré, Marquise d'
199, 206–207, 208

Valois, Madame de 199, 200

Vaughan, Robert 42, 45, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59

Veale, Abraham 43

Westphal, Joachim 235 n. 12

Whitbourne, Richard 125, 140

Willet, Andrew 28, 39

Wright, Thomas 20

Wroth, Lady Mary viii, 16–18, 23, 25, 37,
76–92, 93, 104, 105, 106

Wycliffe, John 29

Xenophon 73, 114–115 n. 34

Zumbo, Gaetano Giulio 211